

3

黄金境界

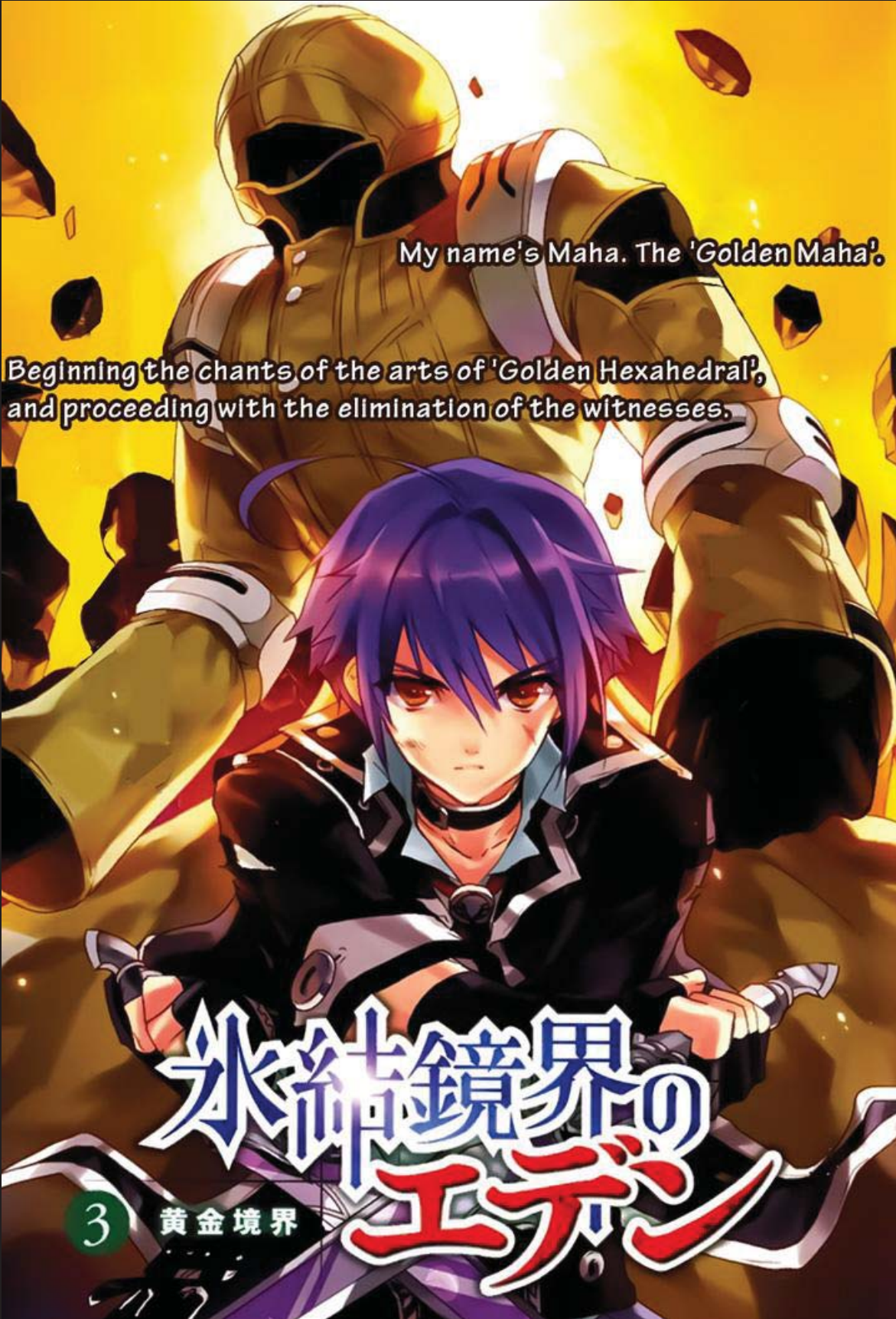
氷結鏡界 エテ

細音 啓

KEI SAZANE



ファンタジア文庫



My name's Maha. The 'Golden Maha'.

Beginning the chants of the arts of 'Golden Hexahedral',
and proceeding with the elimination of the witnesses.

氷結鏡界の エデン

3

黄金境界

The method to
nullify shinryoku,
the melody of
Garden
of
Corrupted Song
<Eden>—

Why do you
think that a
method to totally
eradicate mateki
exists?

My
confidence
is based
on

Seventh
Heaven
Rhythm
<Sophia
Code>.

Golden
Maha,

that body
of yours
is the
strongest
barrier.

Regardless
of how many
people there are,
none of them
are allowed to
bypass this
golden barrier.

The
forbidden

Seventh
True
Rhythm
<Eden
Code>



"Let me support you.

I will definitely analyze
the Golden Arts.

— You can do it, right?"

Prologue

Remaining 72 hours <Countdown> — Maha —

Chapter 1

60 hours — Kagura —

Chapter 2

37 hours — Monica —

Intermission

29 hours — Igun-I —

Chapter 3

12 hours — Jin —

Chapter 4

1 hour — I'sa —

Final Chapter

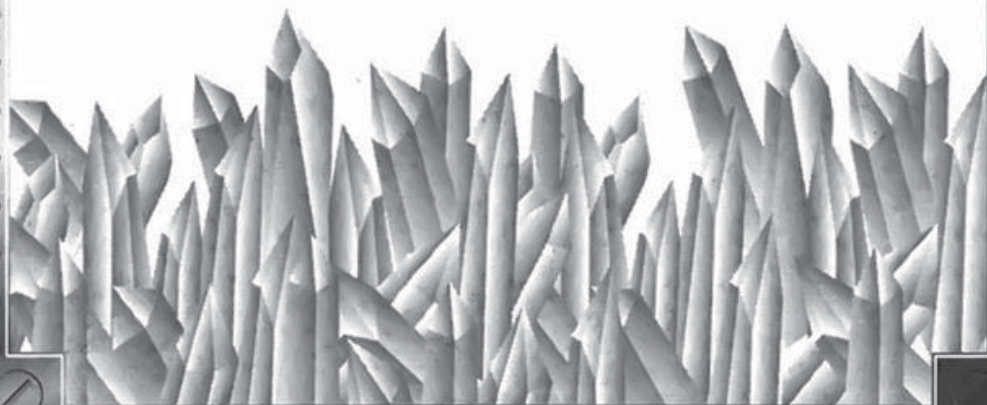
Zero — He who shatters the Gold —

Intermission

The colorless eyes

Epilogue

To warm the icy fingertips



Prologue

Remaining 72 hours — Maha —

That person was a strange man.

At the green plains of a flat gradient.

The plains can be aptly described with the term 'weedy'. The man was standing on top of the slightly elevated hill which was filled with weeds.

"....."

A tall and stout man, dressed in a dirt-yellow robe which colors had already faded.

His eyes were hidden deep within his hood. The long robe stretched from his head to his feet, covering the whole of his body. Not a single part of his body was exposed to the sun - even his fingers were hidden by the sleeves of his robe. Aside from his strange outfit, what was even weirder were the mechanical rings that were restraining the suit.

Located on his neck, shoulders, elbows, wrists, waist and knees.

It's a metallic-colored machine that would give off a glow after

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

each fixed period of time, and they acted like bracelets or belts encircling the various parts of his body. The machines were bound to the body tightly, revealing his broad shoulders as well as those muscular arms.

"....."

There was no wind.

The man was standing motionlessly on one spot, just like the still grass around his feet.

Not a single motion.

Not just that. He was perfectly still.

The heartbeats, the heaving of the shoulders due to respiration, and even the most basic movements of a living organism — all of these were perfectly absent.

An unknown amount of time had passed in the area dominated by silence and stagnancy.

The change came suddenly.

A wild gust of wind raged through the plains.

"Sorry for making you wait, Mr Maha."

Everything happened almost simultaneously.

The wild gust of wind.

The cheerful voice of a man rang through the fields at the same time.

The man in the robe who was motionless the whole time then turned around.

"..... Igun-I."

"I am really sorry. I saw some evening primrose on my way here, which made me lose track of time."

Said the man respectfully, who was being addressed as "Igun-I".

A black coat adorned with golden buttons and coupled with a black pair of shoes, as well as a black fedora. His white pair of gloves was the only thing out of his black outfit that was retaining the sense of coordination amid the chaos.

"Oh yes, speaking about evening primrose."

Ha— a faint hint of smile appeared on the corners of Igun-I's lips. He pointed towards the back.

"I have found some wild strawberries over there. Their redness made them look really sweet. I am planning to pick some before I start my work. How about you?"

The beauty akin to that of a devil.

His pale golden hair was peeking out of the fedora that was hiding

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

his eyes. His nose and mouth were beautifully shaped. And despite not being able to see his eyes, the overall contours of his face gave one the impression of an exceptionally handsome face.

Coupled with a resounding male treble voice as well as a slender and beautifully shaped body, there was more than just beauty exuded by that man - there was an indescribable devilish charm around him.

"....."

"Eh? Leave the strawberries for later, and start on our work first.....? You're really impatient, Mr Maha."

Igun-I shrugged his shoulders exaggeratedly.

"Guess we have no choice. Since the time has come, let us begin now."

—don

As he said that, a giant water tank suddenly appeared next to him.

The cylindrical water tank was big enough to accommodate multiple adults at once. When exactly did he have that prepared? And more importantly, how exactly did he transport it to the plains? The water tank materialized on the plains while Igun-I was speaking — that was the only way to describe what had happened.

"....."

However, the man named Maha did not flinch one bit when he saw the supernatural scene. All he did was lift his head to look into the 'insides' of the water tank.

There was blue liquid in there, as well as countless air bubbles created by the machines beneath the tank. And amid them, floated an 'object' that was shrouded in dark purple mist.

"This is a Yuugenshu. As you can see, it is currently forced into a slumber due to the barriers of shinryoku."

As he looked upwards at the dark purple beast, Igun-I continued speaking in that shifty voice of his,

"Speaking of which, the time of its capture is not too long ago, at the time when the Queen and her Priestesses' Hyouketsu Kyoukai was breached and *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*> was suffering a large-scaled assault by the Yuugenshu. It was indeed overly difficult to try to capture the commanding body, but we did manage to capture quite a few of the weaker ones."

"....."

"Eh? These weak individuals are a killjoy? Please do not make things difficult for me. I am the weakest when it comes to the barrier-types shinryoku spells. And moreover—"

A faint smile appeared on his lips.

"The weaker Yuugenshu are better suited for our current 'experiment'. Most of the strong Yuugenshu are not obedient. As

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

experiment subjects, they get out of normality easily, so they are not suitable in experiments that demand accuracy..... And also, it will be a huge headache should they go out of control."

Kon Maha gave the glass of the water tank a knock.

"Well then, do you still remember the aim of our experiment? The reason you are sent here is so that no humans, beasts or natural disasters harm this water tank during the seventy-two hour experimental period. You are to eliminate anything that attempts to get close to it."

Igun-I then pressed his hand on his fedora.

Though it's uncertain if he was preventing his fedora from being blown away, or if he was just unwilling to show his face that was hidden beneath it.

"That's right, in other words— that body of yours is the strongest barrier. The barrier that is protecting this water tank. Regardless of how many people there are, none of them are allowed to bypass this golden barrier."

The words were said firmly.

It was more than just self-belief. Those words represented absolute certainty due to his unwavering trust.

"....."

Maha, who was looking at the water tank all these while, suddenly

turned around. It seemed like he had something he wanted to say.

"Ahh, of course. You will be the only person in charge of this. I mean, I am just a small fry who has to be out there running about..... It's not like Mr Maha loves to move about, right?"

"....."

"Fufu, I'll be here to pick you up later— alright, there are people coming."

He directed his beautiful chin towards his right.

The black-suited Igun-I, as well as Maha in his golden robe. They could faintly see a five-man team dressed in white ceremonial clothing located quite a distance away from the hill which they were standing on.



While they needed to squint their eyes to be able to barely see the team clearly, the distance between them was gradually shrinking.

"They are *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*>'s..... ahh, those are the guards. They probably received a mission to patrol the nature sector. But what a shame though— seems like Sheltis isn't in that team. I will really love to stay if he is there."

".....?"

"Ah, sorry. I am just mumbling to myself."

He remained in his frivolous attitude and dismissed the curious Maha with a laugh.

"Alright, let us get back on topic. The clash is happening much earlier than anticipated, but Mr Maha's mission is incredibly straightforward: eliminate all that you encounter - no exceptions."

"I see. Then I shall begin."

As he looked at his partner who gave the short reply, Igun-I smiled lightly—

"Well then, 'Golden' Maha. We shall meet again in 72 hours."

That sentence rang throughout the plains.

And at that very moment, the black-suited man was already nowhere to be seen.

Chapter 1

60 hours — Kagura —

{1}

"Con~gra~tu~la~tioooooon on your discharge, Sheltis!"

Eleventh story of *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*>, dormitory of the cadet guards.

The grand sounds of the trumpets as well as a round of applause were waiting for him when he opened the door.

"....."

He froze for a good while with one of his feet stepping into the room—

"Huh.....?"

The young man in his black jacket crossed his arms and blinked in confusion.

He's in his teenage years with a slender face and limbs, as well as a stern expression with a hint of childishness in them. And then there's the head of tea-red colored hair that easily stands out.

"Ah— geez, what a poor reaction, Sheltis! On the rare occasion

when there's actually someone who's celebrating with you, it won't do if you don't use your entire body to express your joy. For example, you should yell out 'Banzai!'."

Eyrie lifted both of her arms up happily while holding onto a toy trumpet.

Fluffy orange hair and oil-stained overalls. Despite being in the prime age of sixteen, this girl here hardly needs to doll herself up or put on any make-up.

"Banzai?"

"Hey— you've been living in the hospital for the past two weeks, right? It will be a huge waste if you don't celebrate it with a more jovial mood!"

With one of her hands placed on her waist, she swung the other hand with the trumpet together in the air.

While facing the girl, the young man, Sheltis, sighed as he continued to hug onto his luggage from his time in the hospital.

"No..... what I'm more curious of is how Eyrie is here when I locked my room?"

Everything began two weeks ago.

After receiving the secret order from the Queen, Sheltis headed off to the *Floating Archipelagos* <Lagoon> to carry out his mission. Not only did they discover the secret facility that was hidden there, he also fought with a cultured Yuugenshu, which led to him suffering from serious injuries on his head. One full month was required for a complete recovery from his injuries.

And so, Sheltis had been staying in the tower's hospital located on

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

the twenty-second story for the past two weeks.....

"..... Could it be that Ilis did something to allow you to get into my room?"

"You're right!"

Eyriey blew on the trumpet yet again.

"It was Ilis who got me here. She said, 'Sheltis is not around, and I am really lonely'."

The girl pointed towards the direction of the bed. The *machine crystal* <Ilis>, which looked like the crystallization of lapis lazuli, was flashing repeatedly in short intervals on the white bed.

"That's right, Eyriey. That's the way to do it. Put in a few more words for me!"

"..... So it is indeed Ilis."

"What do you mean by 'indeed'!? I was so bored, I have calculated pi all the way to its forty seven quadrillion, two hundred and nineteen trillion, eighty four billion, two hundred million, forty two thousand and twenty seventh decimal digit!"

I am really angry right now — the *machine crystal* <Ilis> was giving up a bright red brilliance, as though she was emphasizing that.

"That sounds very interesting."

"Not at all! Sheltis you big idiot! Even

machines will die of boredom if there is no one by their side!"

"..... But you're the one who was chased out of the hospital because you were so noisy, no?"

Though she was initially staying in the hospital with Sheltis, she began to constantly complain about things like: "Hey Sheltis, I am about to die from boredom!" or "Hey hey, come play with me—". After the protests from the doctor who could no longer put a blind eye to what she was doing, he had no choice but to leave her alone in his room.

"Putting that aside, what are your thoughts about the hospitalization?"

"Incredibly painful. I spent nearly everyday sleeping. Even the doctor was stunned and asked me, 'Just what exactly did you do to get an injury like this?'."

"Geez..... Fractures to your skull coupled with bruises all over your body? Your head was bleeding profusely, and the fractured skull would have pierced its way into your brain if you had moved about carelessly. Just what were you doing?" — that was what the female doctor who was in charge of him said.

Special equipment and machines were used to administer various treatment cycles to his head, in tandem with medication to increase his rate of healing and to keep the inflammation under control.

He had undergone two consecutive weeks of the above mentioned treatment by the doctor who was in charge of him. Despite recommendations from the doctor to stay in the hospital for a week longer, he was discharged today as he insisted on recuperating in his own home.

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

"The doctor said that it's just a superficial recovery for now, so I am strictly barred from training temporarily. The wounds may crack open if I do any overly-strenuous exercise."

"As a machine, I think human beings are really fragile when it comes to this. If it is a machine, all that it need is a replacement of its parts, and it will be good as new. Sheltis, why don't you try replacing your whole body with mechanical parts?"

"That sounds too scary. No thanks."

"Eh— It's not bad being a machine, you know?"

After rejecting the *machine crystal* <Ilis>'s suggestion, Sheltis placed the luggage on his bed.

"Right. How're things going on your side?"

"Very enjoyable. I have heard plenty of things from Ilis for the past two to three days. Ah, though she's not here today, Yuto had always been together with us as well."

Eyriey hummed a tune as she poured some hot water from the teapot to a cup.

"Oh right, did you know this? Back when I was hacking into the main computers of *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*>, it was actually Ilis who helped me decode *Daibo Shinsuu*. At that time, I thought it was really strange that I had suddenly managed to decipher the encryption just like that."

"Is that so?"

That was the first time he heard about it. Then again, it is not like the *machine crystal* <Ilis> will tell him anything if he does not take the initiative to ask.

"Mhmm. After chatting with Eyriey, the world suddenly feels much smaller."

And with a relaxed tone, the *machine crystal* <Ilis> continued,

"Back then, I was purely interested in the technical abilities of the hacker. The person definitely must have possessed a certain level of relative knowledge as well as talent. He would be incredibly outstanding if he was in his thirties, and can be considered to be a genius in the floating continent if he was in his twenties. However, I never expected the hacker to be a girl as young as you."

"That's embarrassing. I was just fooling about."

"No, you are really outstanding. Sheltis should learn from her hardworking qualities as well—
Mmm!"

The *machine crystal* <Ilis> finally toned down after being stuffed into Sheltis' bag.

"..... Geez. To think I finally managed to return after much difficulty."

"She must have been really lonely. Also, while I did manage to bring Yuto to *Tenketsu Palace* <Sophia> to play, Chef has been missing you as well. Though she could not make it down here due to work."

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

Eyrie said that as she brought the tea cup to her lips.

"Chef?"

For the two years following his exile from *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*>, it was the young female shopkeeper of *The Two Swans* <*Albiero*> who took him in while he was at the living sector, and allowed him to live in and help out at the shop.

It has been a month since he returned to *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*>, so it was about time for him to visit.

"Did Chef say anything?"

"Mmm. She said, 'Sheltis has been working in the shop for two years, and the shop feels a little empty without him around'."

"..... Is that so."

With one less male, the work load of *The Two Swans* <*Albiero*> would definitely increase. Back when he said that he would be going to *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*>, she had sent him off with a smile that he never thought she would be that depressed about it now.

"She will occasionally lean her face against the table and mumble to herself while looking at the ceiling."

"You mean Chef?"

It was hard for him to imagine that the listless person was the incredibly cheerful and energetic Chef whom he knew.

"What did she talk about?"

"Things like 'What a problem I have here..... I really hope someone as strong as Sheltis will fall off from the sky, so that he can help me with the testing of poison' and etc."

"She's not depressed at all!"

"No no, she really was? And she also said, 'Ahh, I do really need a guy like Sheltis who can work for forty-eight hours straight without food or water. Where on earth do I find someone like that?'."

"..... Well, I am relieved to hear how well she's doing - help me tell her that. Also, no one will drop from the sky to the ground without rhyme or reason."

"Alright~ But you know, she does seem really lonely."

Maybe that was really the case.

Despite her relaxed voice, Eyriey's eyes were giving off a really serious look.

"Well I guess. I'll only need to rest at home for a week. After that, I'll take some time off to pay her a visit."

"Ah, you mean you can't move about yet? That's boring."

"I have a whole load of stuff that I need to settle."

He gave up his chair to Eyriey and sat on the edge of his bed. Sheltis heaved a sigh as he felt the repulsion from the springy properties of his bed.

"..... There's something that I need to think about."

"Hmm? Why are you suddenly being so serious?"

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

"That's right, that's not like Sheltis at all. Hurry up and get to the point—"

"It's regarding the Yuugenshu."

That sentence made Eyriey and the *machine crystal* <Ilis> fall silent at the same time.

"I've been thinking about it during my stay at the hospital. There's something that just doesn't feel quite right..... No, rather, I am gradually beginning to feel like something's amiss."

The group of Yuugenshu that breached Hyouketsu Kyoukai and infiltrated *Tenketsu Palace* <Sophia>, and how they were led by a commanding presence.

And then two weeks ago, the thing that they saw on the unnamed floating island — the Yuugenshu which was being cultivated in the water tank.

"Both Eyriey and Ilis should have seen the cultivated Yuugenshu, right? I will have to confirm what that thing actually is. Also, back during the large-scale assault, it was the first time we saw the existence of a commanding Yuugenshu. Don't you two feel like there has been a lot of strange things going on recently?"

"I can understand your feelings, but the existence of the Yuugenshu have remained a mystery for the past thousand years. Even if you wish to investigate it, you must at least have direction for you to work towards. Do you have something in mind?"

"Mmm— for example, how about re-investigating the places where the Yuugenshu appeared?"

The person who replied was actually Eyriey, who had been sitting on the chair and being silent until just now.

"I am just an ordinary person, so I'm not too sure about the things regarding the Yuugenshu. If you ask me, I will probably start by consolidating data. Since we are dealing with monsters which we're uncertain about even after one thousand years, I'm holding doubts about the legitimacy of the current compiled data."

"Same as what I am thinking. Therefore, I'm thinking of visiting the places where the Yuugenshu had appeared before. Well, one step at a time."

The Yuugenshu that came from the *Garden of Corrupted Song* <Eden> ten thousand meters beneath the floating continent, and squeezed through Hyouketsu Kyoukai to get here. Where exactly did those mist monsters land, and how did they launch their attacks? He hoped he could comb through the whole floating continent and try to see it for himself.

"I agree with your intentions. Should we be able to predict the appearance of the Yuugenshu, we can reduce the damage inflicted by them. However, this is a colossal task. Do you want to seek assistance from Ymy, so that she can mobilize the whole *Tenketsu Palace* <Sophia> with her authority as a Priestess?"

Ymy Ele Soufflenictole. The name mentioned by the *machine crystal* <Ilis> is actually one of the Priestesses protecting the floating continent, as well as Sheltis' childhood friend.

..... I would love to do that, but—

"No. We'll have to keep it a secret from Ymy."

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

He stared at the brilliantly shining *machine crystal* <Ilis>, which possessed high levels of artificial intelligence as well as judgement, and shook his head.

"It's best if Ymy doesn't know about this. I don't wish to make her worry."

"Because of what Monica said on the *Floating Archipelagos* <Lagoon>? The thing about how much pain the Priestesses go through to maintain the barrier?"

"Mmm. I was thinking about that during my stay at the hospital."

The only people who can maintain the shinryoku barrier that protects the floating continent are the Queen and her five Priestesses.

While they are always putting on a smile when facing the public, they have to undergo blood-curdling pain and intense disciplines when they are alone, so as to be able to maintain the barrier.

"I think..... it's best if I don't add on anymore burdens to the Queen or the Priestesses."

The reason for erecting Hyouketsu Kyoukai is because the biggest threat to mankind are the Yuugenshu and the *Garden of Corrupted Song* <Eden>.

Looking at it from another point of view, once the mysteries to Yuugenshu and *Garden of Corrupted Song* <Eden> are solved, the burdens on the Priestesses should decrease. If they can look up on the recent abnormalities to the Yuugenshu, they would definitely be able to find a breakthrough.

"Therefore..... I wish Ymy to focus her attention on Hyouketsu

Kyoukai, and not be distracted by the matters of the Yuugenshu. It's more than enough for me to crack my head on that myself..... What are you two laughing about, Eyriey and Ilis?"

When he refocused his attention on the two, he was confused by their reactions.

"Eh— Because..... right?"

With her close to bursting out in laughter, Eyriey said to the *machine crystal* <Ilis> with a meaningful smile on her face.

"That's right, Eyriey. Fufufu. I see. Here I was wondering why Sheltis has such a clear goal all of the sudden. So it is all for Ymy's sake."

"Mhmm. How to put it? It's really touching."

"..... Hey you two. I'm being serious here."

"There you go again— Right, Sheltis, why don't I just help you create a love potion or something? Make Ymy drink it, and let her confess to you. Then you can just go along with the flow and—"

"I don't need that! Get away from me! Shoo!"

Eyriey's eyes were giving off a shine, as though she was expecting something. Upon facing her bottom-up gaze, Sheltis pushed her away hard.

"Urm— ahem. Enough with the jokes, let us get back on topic. You'll be restricted by your rank somehow or another should you continue to remain as a cadet guard. It is fine for you to want to investigate the Yuugenshu, but you will have to accept more missions that allow you to get

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

promoted to the ranks of a regular guard."

"I will. I won't be able to participate in the conferences if I'm not a regular guard. Moreover, it will be a huge inconvenience in many other areas."

That includes the intelligence gathered about the Yuugenshu, the things happening in *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*> as well as the weapons used by the guards. Since everything will be given priority to regular guards and the ranks above them, there will be times where they cannot cater to the demands of the cadet guards.

"Even if we set all those things aside for the moment, I still think Ymy will be very lonely if you continue to remain as a cadet guard."

"..... I'll do my best."

Just then.

Eyriey suddenly nudged him on the side.

"Hey hey, what about me?"

"You?"

"I mean— seeing how you are deliberately talking about all these things in my presence, you should have some request for me, right? Just like when you want me to hack into the *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*>'s computers."

"Ah, so you noticed? Actually, I do have a favor to ask from you."

"Alright. Since I'm really bored, I guess it's not too bad to work on something?"

Eyriey puffed her chest with a gleeful expression on her face.

"I'm hoping you can help predict when the Yuugenshu will appear. Though we already have information of where the Yuugenshu will appear, we still do not know if there are any patterns to that."

That may seem easy enough, but it is actually an extremely difficult task. For the past few decades, the analysis team of *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*> have been continuously attempting to tackle the problem, but up until now they still have not found any concrete answer.

"..... Predicting the appearance of the Yuugenshu? An old and yet innovative idea. There have been plenty who have tried to research that, but everyone gave up halfway into it – in other words, this is an area that has been abandoned since everyone is helpless about it."

The opinion of the *machine crystal* <*Ilis*> was pretty much spot on. A long time ago, there were ideas of attempting to predict the appearance of the Yuugenshu based on the statistics gathered from their data, and the researchers had arrived at one conclusion.

It is totally unpredictable.

They could not find any correlation from the past data of the Yuugenshu.

Then again, back when he asked Eyriey to hack into the main computers of *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*>. he had pretty much viewed it as nothing more than just an attempt at it. And perhaps like back then, she may be able to come up with something shocking.

"Hmm..... I don't know how I should say this."

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

Eyrie crossed her arms and pursed her lips into a straight line.

"All I can say is, if all you are asking from me is just the forecasts, then I can give you as many as you like, since I can just repeatedly analyze vast amounts of data gathered. However, if you want me to produce forecasts with good reproducibility and repeatability, then I can only know after I try. These sort of things require gut feeling and inspiration."

"But then, this may actually be really interesting."

Next to Eyrie who was crossing her arms, was the flashing *machine crystal* <Ilis>.

"Eyrie, after chatting with you for the past few days, I realized you are filled with a totally different and innovative imagination and creativity that the researchers of *Tenketsu Palace* <Sophia> and I lack. The ability to think and construct theories from an extremely unique view-point is something that the rest of us do not have, and it's a weapon that belongs only to you."

Should Eyrie be able to successfully establish a hypothesis that none of the researchers had ever thought of before, then perhaps they will be a step closer to understanding the secrets behind the Yuugenshu.

"Mmm, I'll give it a try. Oh right, is there a deadline? It would be better if I can come up with something by the time Sheltis' home recuperation comes to an end, right? Which means a week later?"

A week may be too much of a rush.

Since that means he is expecting her to complete something within just a few days, when it took the researchers years to do research on it.

"There's no deadline, but try to be as soon as possible. Okay?"

"Okay. However, I have already received another request before this, and it may take up quite some time. Well, the requester is over there."

She pointed towards the table.

Following the direction in which she was pointing at, all Sheltis could see was the *machine crystal* <Ilis> lying on the table.

"Isn't there only Ilis?"

"Yes, that is right! The requester is me, the extremely cute Ilis!"

"..... This is the first time I see a machine claiming itself as cute."

He took a look at the *machine crystal* <Ilis> while letting out a sigh. He already knew this clearly since way back, but the words and actions of this machine crystal are very humane.

"Well, to put it in the context of human beings, this request is like a health check. She will be conducting checks on my thoughts program, processing program and stored data to see if there is any virus that modifies my data. Generally speaking, I have always been conducting checks on my own, but there is the possibility that my diagnosis program is damaged.

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

Therefore, it is important for me to get someone to conduct a check on me."

"That's right. Therefore, I'll be the one in charge of conducting the check. Ilis already told me the things to do, so what follows next is assembling the machines and writing out the program."

Eyriey raised her arm quickly.

"I have already booked *Tenketsu Palace* <Sophia>'s presidential suite located at the forty-seventh story that is reserved for VIP use for a whole week. This is to reward Eyriey for your services, so please do a good job on my diagnosis."

"Ohho, you really booked that room? Well done, Ilis!"

Eyriey hugged the *machine crystal* <Ilis> at her chest and jumped up with a wide smile on her face.

"That's nothing. It is me who should be thanking you for agreeing to my unreasonable request— oh right. Sheltis, I originally planned to get someone to pass the message to you, but thankfully you got discharged early. Please take a look beneath your bed."

"Beneath my bed..... hmm?"

Deep in the darkness, are a pair of blades shimmering from the dim sources of light.

"Fixing a silver monad as the core, and encasing its surrounding with a layer of azure crystals

of Hyouketsu Kyoukai. Its limit to destruction is set to be at sevenfold— you must be more familiar with it than anything else, since those are the twin swords specially constructed for anti-Yuugenshu use. Also, I constructed a black sheath made of chrome ceramic, and it is placed in the wardrobe. You'll be able to use them should there be any emergencies during the period when I'm not around."

The *machine crystal* <Ilis> shall temporarily remove herself from the role of assisting him.

As he is normally dependent on her in various different aspects, he could not help but feel a little uneasy. However, there was no helping it this time round.

"I guess that's all you can do. Eyriey, I'll leave Ilis in your hands."

"Alright. Then I shall make my move."

Eyriey tied the necklace with the *machine crystal* <Ilis> on her neck.

"—Ah, right. Due to this, regarding the research on the regularity of the appearance of Yuugenshu that we were talking about earlier....."

"Mmm, but you're going to perform the diagnosis on Ilis first, right?"

Just as he was done saying that, Eyriey showed a mischievous smile and crossed her arms to make a 'x' shape.

"I was only half done with what I wanted to say. In regards to that

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

request of yours, how about I introduce you to a friend of mine? She's a girl named Kagura. She has a slightly weird personality, but she is incredibly strong when it comes to analysis."

"Eyriey's friend?"

"Well— it's not like we are on really good terms with each other. We only got to know each other at the finals of the <<Homemade-Calculator Contest>> held by the Mechanical Bureau of *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*>."

"What competition is that?"

"Participants are the calculator-fanatics from all over the floating continent. There's a total of one thousand and five hundred participants."

"No wait, that's quite a strange amount of people! To think that it's actually more than the number of guards in *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*>!"

Then again, it was indeed very much like Eyriey's style of making new friends.

"Putting that aside, I initially didn't know that she was working in *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*>. After that, I bumped into her not too long ago, and so I greeted her with 'Ah, long time no see' and such."

"Ahhh, I see. Which means that the girl works for the Mechanical Bureau?"

"No, I didn't ask her yet. It's not like I'm interested in which department she works in."

The girl shook her head very quickly.

"In any case, help me find her, Sheltis. I'll do a check on the electronic name list of *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*> later. Well then, that's all!"

With the necklace of the *machine crystal* <*Ilis*> worn on her neck, Eyriey picked up a half-assembled machine with one of her arms and took off.

Sheltis looked at her tiny back as she left his room.

"..... Phew."

As he stood in the center of the silent room, Sheltis took a deep breath.

— I wonder how Ymy's doing.

As he thought about the face of the girl who is now taking on the role of a Priestess, Sheltis leaned his body against the chair.

The last time both of them met was two weeks ago, during the night when he was sent to the tower's hospital. Since he knew about the hectic workloads of a Priestess, he could not help but worry if Ymy was pushing her body too hard despite her fatigue.

"So it's also the job of a Sennenshi to worry about things like that huh....."

Not only do they have to protect the Priestesses, they have to care about the Priestesses' body and mind as well.

And that was something that he learned after visiting the *Floating Archipelagos* <*Lagoon*> with the Sennenshi Leon and the ex-apprentice-Priestess Monica.

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

Leaning against the back of the chair, he looked up into the ceiling and bit his lower lips in bitterness.

"Forget about the Sennenshi..... the entry to become a regular guard is already so difficult."

To become a regular guard, one must form a team consisting of at least three cadet guards, and take up missions issued by *Tenketsu Palace* <Sophia>. However, he has not joined any team yet.

Even though he had already made a promise with her, he was being rejected by the promotion system of *Tenketsu Palace* <Sophia>.

— I can't make Ymy wait. I'll have to shake off my rank of a cadet guard as quickly as possible, so that she can be at ease.

Despite his desire to become a regular guard, there was nothing that he could focus his attention on. The only thing that had changed were his worries, which were gradually accumulating thicker and thicker, like snow.

"I know I can't act with undue haste, but time is still going by way too quickly."

The electronic calender on his desk was giving off a blue glow in the field where it was displaying the date.

— It's already time for that.

The handover ceremony for Hyouketsu Kyoukai.

It has been exactly a month since he entered *Tenketsu Palace* <Sophia>, and it was getting closer and closer to the ceremony where the Queen hands over the barrier to the Priestesses.

{2}

The lights replicating the illumination of the sun were illuminating the corridor brightly.

The speakers installed in the ceiling were playing out the cries of the birds as well as the rustling of plants. The sounds were not artificially synthesized, but recorded straight from the nature sector on the floating continent.

The singing of the wild birds, the foams of the waterfall, the flowing water of the streams as well as the cries of the insects. All of them interwove together to form a majestic sound.

Two hundred and eighty seventh story of *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*> — the floor which was designated to the fourth and fifth Priestess was filled with the refreshing sounds of nature.

"..... Mm~~mm..... What should I do....."

Ymy Ele Soufflenictole — a girl with golden hair, jade-colored eyes and a pure white vestment. Her looks leave a deep impression to anyone who sees her.

Her left hand was holding onto a small notebook, while her right was holding a pencil. On her adorable face was an expression deep in thought. Ymy was writing and erasing on the notebook repeatedly.

"..... Let's see..... 'Ladies and gentlemen, thank you all for

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

gathering here despite your busy schedules'..... sounds a little too stiff. Then how about 'Everyone, thanks for gathering here today!'..... that is easy for me, but it sounds a little too casual..... Ah— geez! Someone please help me with this!"

Upon confirming that there was no one else in the corridor, she let out a cry.

"..... What a headache. It will be tomorrow soon."

The handover ceremony of Hyouketsu Kyoukai, an important monthly ceremony to the Priestesses, will be held tomorrow. The Priestesses will temporarily replace the Queen and shoulder the huge responsibility of maintaining Hyouketsu Kyoukai.

The person in charge of maintaining the barrier this time round is her senior, Priestess Meimel. Meimel is the second ranked Priestesses of the five, and is also the Priestess who is most well-versed in the arts of barrier-types shinryoku. Nothing will go wrong with the ceremony. Even if something happen, Ymy and Syun-rei will be around to assist immediately..... that's right, there was no need for her to worry.

— However, it was different for the residents in the living sector, as well as the guards of *Tenketsu Palace* <Sophia>.

A large-scale invasion of the Yuugenshu occurred a month ago. The Yuugenshu set their sights at the instant when the Queen was about to handover the barrier to the Priestesses, and used the opportunity to break through Hyouketsu Kyoukai.

"That was our responsibility, so it is inevitable for the people to feel uneasy..... they are afraid that the barrier will be breached once more."

Of course, the Priestesses were not planning to repeat the same mistakes as well.

New rites had been added into the barrier spell, and the shinryoku waves of the barrier had been modified and strengthened as well. Even if the Yuugenshu were to try to break through the barrier yet again, it is highly unlikely that they will succeed with the same methods.

However, it is difficult for the residents of the living sector to understand such technical terms. They had to use some other methods to remove the uneasiness in the civilians.

"But still, to convey the message of 'please do not worry, everyone' via a speech..... that is just exaggerating."

She walked listlessly in the corridor.

She had no idea who was the person to suggest it, but it must surely be one of the directors of the tower. In order to stress the fact that the handover of Hyouketsu Kyoukai is successful, they had made a last-minute decision to have a Priestess announcing it to the public while doing so in front of everyone in *Tenketsu Palace* <Sophia>.

Since Meimel has to take part in the handover of the barrier, Ymy was the only one left to deliver the speech to the public. Also, it seemed like the upper brass were expecting a grand speech

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

instead of something simple.

"..... My head hurts. I'm the weakest when it comes to this."

The speech will be held at the outdoor training grounds of *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*>. Not only does she have to deliver the speech under the sight of over a thousand guards, it was said that the speech will be broadcast live to all the houses in the living sector through the official channels, so it's something incredibly important.

Her cheeks went red just from the thought.

She definitely will not be able to sleep tonight. Her nerves will keep her wide awake. Just as she was about to hug her head and let out a moan— Ymy suddenly stopped in her tracks.

Speaking of which.

..... I have to give a speech in front of the guards.

..... Meaning to say, that includes Sheltis as well? Will he be at the scene too?

Her childhood friend who was injured while fighting against the Yuugenshu at the *Floating Archipelagos* <*Lagoon*>.

She was worried about his condition, but considering her stance as a Priestess, it will be very difficult for her to visit a mere cadet guard who was hospitalized. Two weeks had passed by unknowingly while she was trying to find an excuse and a chance to visit him.

"..... I really want to see him."

She wondered if he was resting properly and not pushing himself to train. Is he eating his meals punctually everyday? Is the recovery of his injuries going well? Once she started thinking about all these things, she could not stop. Her line of thought became chaotic, and there was a terrible sensation in her chest.

..... He has done so much for me, and had even injured himself as a result.

..... And yet I cannot even visit him regularly.

One of them is a Priestess who wields absolute authority in *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*>, while the other is just a cadet guard, the lowest position available in the tower. That is the vast difference between their ranks.

It won't be easy for them to even speak to each other openly in public.

"Just as I thought..... I've really burdened him, right?"

Since we are childhood friends, I may not have noticed it - however, upon thinking about it a little deeper, I must have caused a huge burden on him for the past month.

The reason he wanted to be a Sennenshi is because he promised to protect me.

He returned to her after being exiled to the living sector. Since

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

then, he had received missions as a cadet guard, and was injured during his fight with the Yuugenshu.....

Should I really not do anything for Sheltis, who is being that selfless?

Should I really do nothing but to wait for him at the peak of the tower till his arrival?

..... I don't like this at all.

"_____"

She pressed her hands lightly against her chest.

"Please, do not put yourself in danger ever again."

At the very least, I hope you understand that you do not have to push yourself so hard. I know better than anyone else about the amount of effort you've put in. Therefore, there is no need for you to be so impatient for my sake and get yourself into danger as a result.

I really wish I can tell him that.

"..... What is this feeling..... in me?"

Even though she was just being concerned about her childhood friend, as per usual.

However, she could not understand the feelings that were growing

in her heart. It encompassed the feelings of happiness, unrest and uneasiness. How should she describe that feeling?

Just then—

A voice suddenly rang out, which caused her to break out of the dream-like state that she was in.

"There there— Syun-rei, you won't be able to run away. Don't be shy, there's no reason for you to be—"

At the other end of the corridor, came the slow voice of the senior Priestess.

"..... But should someone else see this....."

"Don't worry— this floor is for the Sennenshi and the Priestesses' exclusive use. The only other people who will come here are the clerks."

It seemed like the two Priestesses were talking about something.

One of the Priestesses has bright emerald-colored hair, a long and slender body, as well as an elegant air around her. The other was a Priestess wearing a red woven vestment with a tiny stature and a tender looks that were especially striking.

They were the second Priestess Meimel and the fourth Priestess Syun-rei respectively. At first glance, it seemed like Syun-rei was busy running away, while Meimel was chasing her from behind with a paper bag in her hands—

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

"Fufu, caught you— Why don't you just give up already, Syun-rei?"

"..... I-I do not want to wear these clothes."

"I don't think so— I think you will definitely look good in them."

While grabbing onto both of Syun-rei's arms tightly, Meimei took out the clothing from the bag.

It was a pale red one-piece dress, which looked to be rather chic. It was made out of lace that is slightly translucent and thin. From the intricate sewing, one can easily know that it is made from the hands of an incredibly skilled seamstress.

"..... It is transparent."

"This style is the latest rage in town— the clothes that you typically wear are kimono. Once in a while, you should try your hands on how girls your age dress up in the living sector."

"..... My shoulders will be seen."

Syun-rei stared hard at the one-piece dress which exposes the wearer's shoulders and refused to give in. To her, compared to the vestments that she usually wears, that dress might just be as revealing as underwear.

"Look, Syun-rei. Leon may actually like this, you know?"

"..... Leon?"

Syun-rei was trying to break free, but she froze all of the sudden.

That person is her exclusive guardian and also a great sword user. As someone who is anthropophobic and afraid to walk out of *Tenketsu Palace* <Sophia> alone, Leon is the only male whom Syun-rei gives her absolute trust.

"That's right— why don't you wear this dress and welcome him when he returns from his trip? His heart will definitely skip a beat if he sees you in a different style of clothes from usual."

"..... B-But.....?"

"I know, you must be shy to be the only one wearing it, right? But don't you worry. That's because—"

Syun-rei's rationality was left hanging on a thread.

And as such, Meimel showed her brightest smile yet.

"I've prepared an even better dress for Ymy."

"..... Ymy too?"

"Mhmm. I know you'll be very embarrassed by yourself. Here, take a look."

Meimel then took out another one-piece dress.

It was totally different from Syun-rei's dress. At first look, it may not seem to be revealing. However, the slit by the side was opened all the way up to the thighs. It was also designed to be body-

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

hugging, meaning that the curves will be exposed for all to see.

"..... T-This is?"

"I secretly ordered it to be custom made for Ymy. You see, the slit opens all the way up to the thighs here."

Syun-rei gulped. Meimel began to explain happily,

"And also, should you tighten this thing here, her beautiful curves will be made even more obvious. What do you think about her wearing this?"

"..... She is really daring."

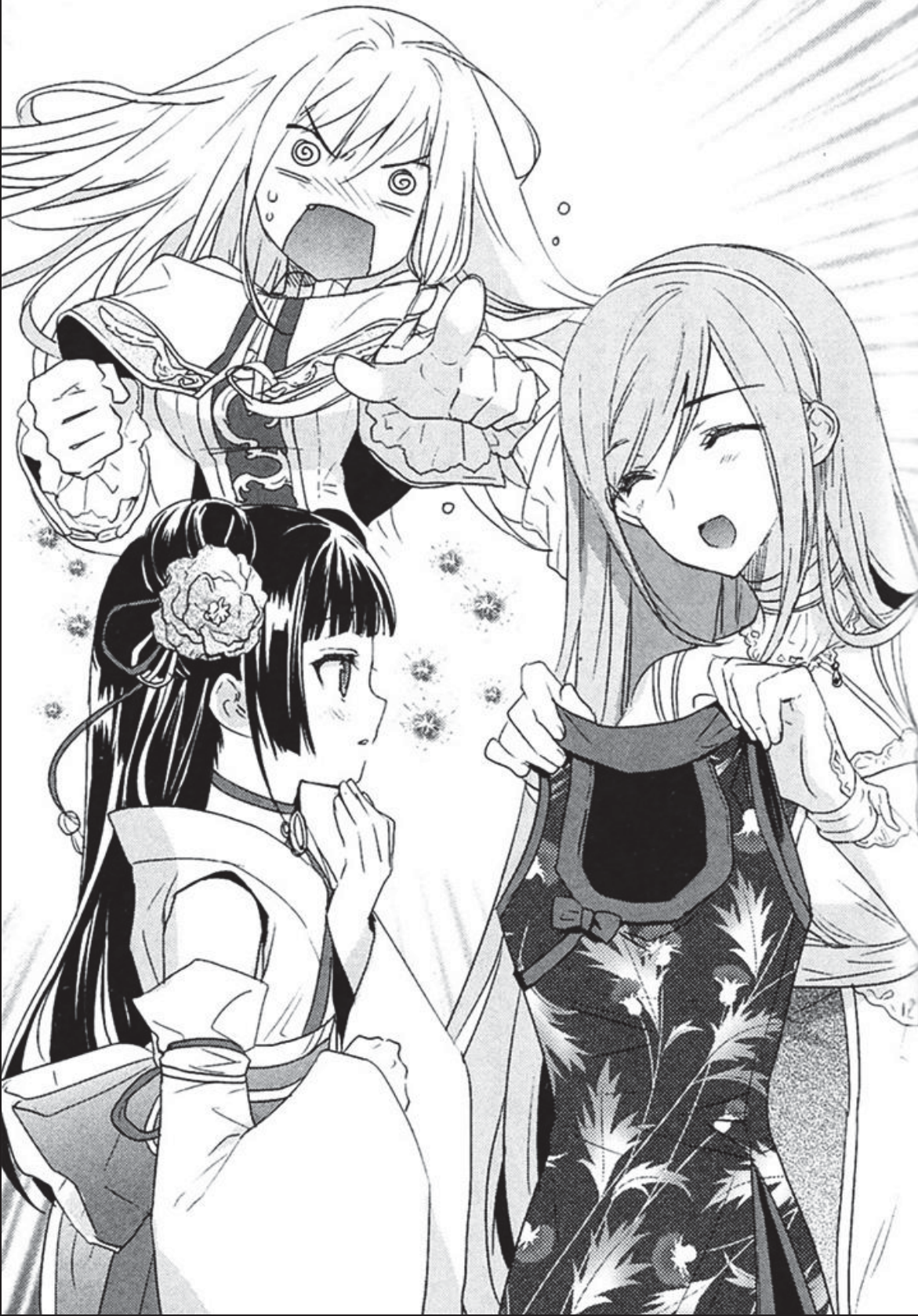
"Right? Look at her bust and waist that doesn't match her age at all. Not only that, but according to the records of her measurements which I sneaked a peek at, it is shocking to know that she is actually still developing! Should she wear this, a whole bunch of guys will definitely be smitten by her charms. The strongest Priestess is about to be born."

"..... Mmm."

"Seems like you finally understand. If so, then Syun-rei should be willing to change into this dress, right? There is no need to worry, since Ymy's dress is much more—"

And before Meimel could finish her sentence.

"W-Who will want to wear that sort of thing——!"



GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

"— embarrassing than yours— Gyu!"

The notebook thrown by Ymy had landed accurately on the the temples of the senior Priestess.

"Y-Ymy..... you've indeed grown. That is a surprise attack that came out of the blue."

"Meimel! Will you stop teaching Syun-rei these strange things!?"

Ymy ran between the two of them and shielded Syun-rei from Meimel, who was putting on a strange smile.

"..... Geez. I was thinking what important things the two of you might be talking about, and I was listening to it so attentively."

Behind them was Ymy's room. Meaning to say, the two girls were putting on a farce right in front of her room.

"And Meimel! Tomorrow is the day where her Highness hands over the barrier to you, so how can you be so relaxed? D-Do you know that I haven't been sleeping well since yesterday, and was wrecking my brain the whole day to try to come up with a speech for tomorrow!?"

"..... Boohoo, I'm being lectured by Ymy."

The senior Priestess pretended to cry.

"Mei— mel—? Can you please be more serious—"

"You're right— well then, let's talk about something serious."

"..... Eh?"

Meimel was originally feigning tears, but her expression changed immediately into that of a sneaky smile.

"I have something to say to you and Syun-rei — I found Syun-rei really quickly, but since you weren't in your room, I have no choice but to attract your attention by using this method. And since Ymy insists on talking about serious things, I guess we have no choice but to do so—"

This is way too suspicious.

I can feel my sweat sliding past my cheeks. To think that the series of mischief pulled off by Meimel was all just a trap to lure me here.

"U-Urm..... I suddenly remember that I have some urgent matters to attend to."

"Ara, don't even think of running away—?"

"T-That's just too sly! So that was all just a trap to lure me!"

"There there, calm down. This is something that has to do with the Government Sector— and it concerns Sheltis as well."

— It concerns Sheltis as well as the Government Sector?

With that said, she could not help but recall the incident that happened two weeks ago.

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

"Is it about the incident earlier? Regarding the *Floating Archipelagos* <Lagoon>."

"That's right. It's about the three man team with both Leon and Sheltis in it. The investigation team that was sent to the *Floating Archipelagos* <Lagoon> in the airspace of the Government Sector under the orders of Queen Salah."

"..... I'll stick around."

She nodded hesitantly.

The Government Sector — in this world, it is a huge organization in charge of handling the politics.

For *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*>, the Queen and the Priestesses hold the highest rank, and are responsible for the rituals and protection of the floating continent.

Tenketsu Palace <*Sophia*> symbolizes mysteriousness, while the Government Sector symbolizes order.

Both parties have the same task of maintaining a reign over the floating continent..... Though in actual fact, it is the Queen and the Priestesses who are well adored by the citizens, and the Government Sector is quite unhappy about that.

The clash between the two sides intensified over time.

In fact, the Government Sector used to be stationed on the floating

continent, but they moved their headquarters to the *Floating Archipelagos* <Lagoon> instead, and declared it as their territory. According to rumors, they have been conducting research and development in their territory as well.....

"You should have read Leon's report, right?"

There was no room for question or objection.

That was how authoritative Meimel's voice was despite her calm tone.

"..... Yes."

The things Leon and Sheltis witnessed on the *Floating Archipelagos* <Lagoon>.

The floating island was uncharted on the maps, and on it was a hidden research facility. There was a secret passage in the facility which leads to the basement. Located deep within the grounds, was a giant water tank that was incubating a Yuugenshu.

"If I remember right, *Tenketsu Palace* <Sophia> has issued an official inquiry via the directors to the Government Sector last week. In the official inquiry, we asked only about the existence of the research facility, but we did not mention anything about the 'water tank'."

"That's right— We've received their reply this morning, but there exists a small problem. Firstly, they did not answer any of the queries that we had raised. Secondly, they are demanding an explanation and apology for Leon's team's aircraft infringing the

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

Government Sector's airspace."

"..... That is quite brazen of them."

Not only were they ignoring all the questions about the facilities, they were actually demanding an apology from *Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>*. A response as one-sided as that is not something that one will expect from an official reply.

"*Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>* had responded calmly to that. However, here lies the crux of the issue — they are claiming this: 'Taking into consideration the incidents that happened earlier, we are unable to tolerate the infringement of our airspace that has occurred over the past few years'."

Infringement of the airspace over the past few years?

Upon realizing Meimel's doubt, Ymy and Syun-rei looked at each other.

"That's strange. The only records of us trespassing the airspace of the Government Sector was just that sole incident. Of course, there were cases where the aircraft were forced to land there due to accidents, but such things typically do not happen more than once a year."

"I find this weird as well— there is an obvious discrepancy between the information of *Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>* and the Government Sector's, and out of which one of the sides must be wrong. However, both sides had issued official statements about this, and both are very confident about it. Just what is happening here?"

"Well....."

Since Ymy knew very well what was happening around *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*>, she had no doubts on official statement issued by *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*>. If that was the case, was it the Government Sector who had got it all wrong?

"What is your opinion on this, Meimel?"

"Me? Well....."

She closed her mouth and placed her finger on her luscious lips. Ymy and Syun-rei held their breaths as they waited for her to speak—

"I guess I won't say it just yet. Now is not the time for me to reveal this."

However, Meimel put on a smile and turned her body around.

"Eh? H-How can you do that? That is just too sly of you to leave us hanging at a time like this!"

"Nope— this is a secret. There is still something I have yet to confirm with Queen Salah..... Speaking of which, there is something that I will like to ask you instead, Ymy."

In contrast with the gentle smile she had on earlier, the senior Priestess' smile had changed into a mischievous one.

"Ymy, you are to give a speech to everyone in *Tenketsu Palace*

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

<Sophia> tomorrow, right? In front of more than a thousand people."

"..... That is the arrangement."

"Mmm— since this is such an important task that has no room for failure, it is best that you practice it, right? As a senior Priestess, it is my duty to guide my juniors so that they will not embarrass themselves."

"..... H-How should we go about doing that?"

"To have a relaxing and delightful rehearsal, of course. Syun-rei and I shall be the audience, so just treat it as though you are giving a real speech, okay? Ah, don't forget to smile."

Meimel leaned over while trying her hardest to hold back her laughter.

Under her nervousness and shyness, the junior Priestess who was trying her hardest to say the scripted speech is definitely someone worth teasing — it was as though Meimel's sparkling eyes were telling Ymy that.

That's bad.

"I-I'm still coming up with the script."

"It's fine, it's fine. Just say what comes to your mind. Ah, right, I have a great idea here. Since we just so happen to have this thing here, why don't you change into this dress while you are doing

your speech? I think all the males in *Tenketsu Palace* <Sophia> will definitely have their gaze fixed on your body!"

Meimel once again took out the custom-made one-piece dress.

"Uh..... Uhhhhh!?"

..... How can that be possible?

She's asking me..... to wear that shameful dress while I give that embarrassing speech..... There is no way I can do that. And should Sheltis ever see me in this, I will not be able to face him for the rest of my life.

— It is best that I run away from this.

Right after Ymy made up her mind, she shook off Meimel's hands and ran away.

"I-I suddenly remember that I have something urgent to attend to!"

"Ah, Ymy, wait! Syun-rei, let's give chase!"

"..... Those two are really energetic."

Syun-rei sighed as she looked at the two Priestesses engaged in an intense game of cat and mouse..... there was nothing she could do about them. Since Leon was not around, she decided to return to her room to rest.

— Eh?

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

Just then, she noticed that the electrical lights on the wall were flickering continuously. Whenever the conference room is flashing, it means that the meeting is not the typical ones. That should be the signal that is calling for an emergency meeting.

"..... The two hundred and sixtieth story?"

It is the conference floor that is under the jurisdiction of the Law Enforcement Bureau. Meaning, they were holding an emergency meeting for the squad captains as well as the cadres guards.

— What is happening around here?

Since Leon was not by her side, Syun-rei could not understand the implications behind the flashing on the white wall.

Chapter 2

37 hours — Monica —

{1}

"It's only the morning training, and yet you guys are all worn out already? Don't give me that, you brats!"

The furious roar from the instructor rang through the outdoor training grounds.

There are close to a thousand cadet guards, and ten instructors who are in charge of training everyone. While about half the cadet guards have already rose to the second rank and are already carrying out missions, the training grounds were still filled with people everywhere.

"Kagura, Kagurakagura....."

Sheltis was sitting leisurely on the bench at a corner of the training grounds.

He was murmuring the name of Eyriey's friend while staring at the training.

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

"Ah— can't do it. There is no way I can recognize her. If only they have her picture on the electronic name list."

Everything started from an hour ago.

"There are two people who fulfills the criteria."

After searching for 'Kagura' in *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*>'s electronic name list, he had obtained two results. However, there lies the problem.

— There are actually two person named 'Kagura'.

And Sheltis had no way of differentiating which Kagura was the one whom he was searching for.

One of them is from the computer development division of Towers Control, and is in charge of controls management.

The other seemed to be the same as Sheltis - a cadet guard.

"..... So who is the Kagura whom Eyriey was talking about?"

He scanned through the vast training grounds.

Out of the two Kaguras, he had decided to focus his attention on the cadet guard. After coming to the training ground with that intention in mind, he then realized that it was not easy to find a specific person within such a huge area.

The root of that problem lies in the fact that he had no idea how

Kagura looks like, and he did not know any of her unique traits either.

"Since it's not easy to find her here, should I try looking at the Towers Control instead..... But I have never went to that floor before."

The other Kagura who is in the computer development division.

The computer development division maintains and manages the mainframe of the whole tower. That division has no direct link with Sheltis, who is a guard. Simply put, that floor is not a place where he could get close to easily.

"..... As with the way things are now, it's not about whether I like it or not. I'll just give them a visit."

He was about to stand up from the bench.

Just then—

A female cadet guard walked past him.

A girl holding onto a pair of *crossed rods* <Rosario>, with her long sakura-colored hair tied behind her back.

On her beautiful face was a pair of grey eyes that were sharp and serene. Her slender figure could be seen clearly despite the pure white ceremonial clothing that she was wearing. Each of her hand was holding onto a *crossed rod* <Rosario> crafted out of black gold.

..... Monica?

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

Just as he was thinking of her name, the other girl turned her head around at the same time as if their thoughts were connected. Her eyes widened.

"Sheltis?"

"Ah, long time no—"

"You idiot!"

He did not have the chance to finish his greeting. Everything happened in an instant.

"Why didn't you tell me you have been discharged?"

"Eh? No, I am discharged, but I am still recuperating, so it's nothing huge."

"— Idiot."

The second 'idiot' from her.

However, that line was filled with gentleness that was missing from the first.

"Even so, you are to report that to me as well. Because I..... well..... I am very worried, you know?"

Monica turned her face to the side, perhaps so that she could use her sakura-colored hair to hide her blushing face.

"..... You're right. Sorry, I didn't think of that."

Thinking back, that was indeed the case. Monica had visited his ward countless times for the past two weeks. She must have been really worried about him.

"I am not demanding an apology from you. Then again, it's great that you are fine now."

Monica took a glance at the empty seat on the bench. Go ahead — after giving her a nod of approval, Monica sat herself on the other empty seat.

"....."

Sheltis sneaked a peek at her side profile.

Monica Esperanto.

She should be a year older than him - a cadet guard who is eighteen years old. She used be an apprentice-Priestess, but she changed class to be a cadet guard.

"Since you are not participating in the training today, that means that you have not recovered fully yet?"

"The doctor's instruction is that I am banned from training for a week. Only after that does she finally agree to me recuperating at my home."

"What. That's not long, but not short either."

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

Monica seemed to find that pretty interesting, and let out a light laugh.

"It will not be easy for you when you return back to the squad after your recuperation period is over. The term 'just recovered' does not exist in the dictionary of the instructor."

"..... Spare me from that."

Monica's ceremonial clothing was slightly dirty and her face was glistening from her sweat. She had probably just gone through the hellish training of Instructor Yumelda.

"Speaking of which."

Monica sorted her feelings a little after ending that topic on a happy note.

"It's obvious you'll be continuing with the training, but will you be accepting the missions under the rewards system as well?"

"After my body recovers, since I'll not be able to take part in the test that is required to get myself promoted as a regular guard if I do not take up missions to earn myself the reward points. I'll have to work hard on that."

After a moment of silence.

"Have you decided on which team to join?"

"How can that be? Monica, you should know very well about how I am being ostracized by the rest of the cadet guards. I'll probably be rejected even if I want to."

"..... I see."

Disappointment and relief. The two conflicting feelings were sandwiched in Monica's words.

And next.

"Well—"

"Actually—"

At the exact same moment.

The both of them spoke and looked at each other.

"D-Did you want to say something?"

"You too, Monica."

Monica's face went red from embarrassment as Sheltis pointed that out.

"I-I am fine with saying it after you, so you go first— Hey, why are you laughing..... I am being serious here!"

"Ahaha. Sorry, it just feels really funny."

She has always given him the impression as someone who is

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

always calm and collected, so her flustered expression was something rare, and she looked really cute. However, he would probably receive a harsh scolding from her should he say that to her.

"You can go first."

"..... Okay. I'll go straight to the point then."

She coughed lightly once, and then—

"I hope you can join the team that I have created."

— He had never heard her talking about it while he was hospitalized.

She must have really wanted to tell him about it, but she dare not do so.

"I have been thinking about it for a long time....."

The girl's hands that were on her thighs were trembling, as though she was releasing the emotional feelings inside her.

"Before I met you, I have always been a failure. I am very clear about the fact that no team will want me..... but deep down, I was still holding on to that glimmer of hope..... I naively believed that one day, there will be a team that will welcome me in..... But that won't do. I will never change if I continue to wait passively."

She bit her lips and looked into the sky.

"So this time, I want to invite you into the team that I have created myself. My abilities are not as impressive as yours, and I have no experience as a team leader. But at the very least..... there is something that I can do."

"I will become a team captain who trust my team members more than any other captains of the other teams."

It was as though she was telling him her dreams.

Her grey eyes which originally gave people the impression of calmness were suddenly giving off a shine - they were lit with a passion that was never seen from her before.

"And so, I hope you can join my team."

"I....."

"I can wait if you need time to consider. You can just reject me if you are unwilling to do so."

"No, that's not what I meant!"

Sheltis raised his hands and waved them around when he saw Monica looking at him with an uneasy expression in her eyes.

"It's not that I am unwilling..... I was just surprised. I thought that the previous mission was the last time I will team up together with Monica."

"Why?"

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

"..... I thought that the other teams would have approached Monica already."

Just as he had discussed with Ilis back then, Monica's capabilities are definitely not poor.

After the fight against the Yuugenshu at the *Floating Archipelagos* <Lagoon>, she might have regained her confidence. During the two weeks when he was in the hospital, there was a possibility of her joining a team which she liked. Either that, or she might have already gathered some teammates to set up a new team.

"D-Didn't I say it just now!? I..... you know..... I wish form a team with you."

Monica blushed as she explained with an almost inaudible voice.

She was waiting for him. And despite the fact that she could start her recruitment first, she deliberately waited for him, and had thus delayed the formation of the team.

"We were together during the team battles as well, so..... it feels like there's an affinity between us."

"....."

— That's right. And that's the reason why Sheltis was surprised.

He had never dreamed that someone would invite him into a team.

He is the only cadet guard to wear black among all the others who wear white, and he did not reveal everything about himself. Not only do the people around him look at him with strange glances, most of the teams were filled as well, so there were no place for him to join in.

Under those circumstances, should he want to earn the reward points, he could only hope for teams that are recruiting temporary members, or to perhaps sneak into the existing teams whenever a mission pops up. He had already prepared himself to do all that.

"..... I'll confirm with you once more. You sure you are fine with me?"

"Is there anything that is holding you back?"

That concise question stabbed deep into his heart like a sharp blade.

"Well..... I am personally very concerned about it."

— There is no way I can reveal my past.

That I am someone who had fallen into the *Garden of Corrupted Song* <Eden> three years ago, and is officially proclaimed by the authorities as dead.

The twin sword wielder who has returned from the *Garden of Corrupted Song* <Eden>. He had lost his shinryoku that should exist in all human beings, and instead he brought along with him mateki, which is the same as those in Yuugenshu.

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

"I am feeling very uneasy about myself."

"Why?"

"..... Perhaps because of how mysterious I am compared to all the other cadet guards."

Sheltis bit on his lips and looked upwards into the eyes of Monica.

The twin swords wielder with a mysterious past — there is the possibility of him bringing mistrust to the whole team due to his existence. It is a team that Monica created after much difficulty, but the problem of mistrust may arise because of one heresy cadet guard.

"I..... can't quite talk about myself. Even if Monica is willing to believe in me, the other teammates will still treat me with mistrust. That will obviously lead to the breakdown of the camaraderie of team, which will in turn be a problem for you. Therefore—"

"So that's what you are worrying about."

"..... Eh?"

Oh you — she heaved a sigh while smiling wryly.

With her arms crossed in front of her chest and her eyes narrowed, she looked just like a mother who was about to enlighten her naive child.

"Isn't that something very normal? Everyone will have one or two

secrets that they cannot reveal to anyone. It's the same for me, and the same for you as well. If there are secrets that cannot be revealed, then there are secrets that can be shared with everyone as well. It all depends on you."

"But."

"No buts. Think about my words carefully. Is there anything wrong with what I had said?"

He thought about it repeatedly..... and finally, Sheltis nodded his head hesitantly.

"..... There's nothing wrong at all."

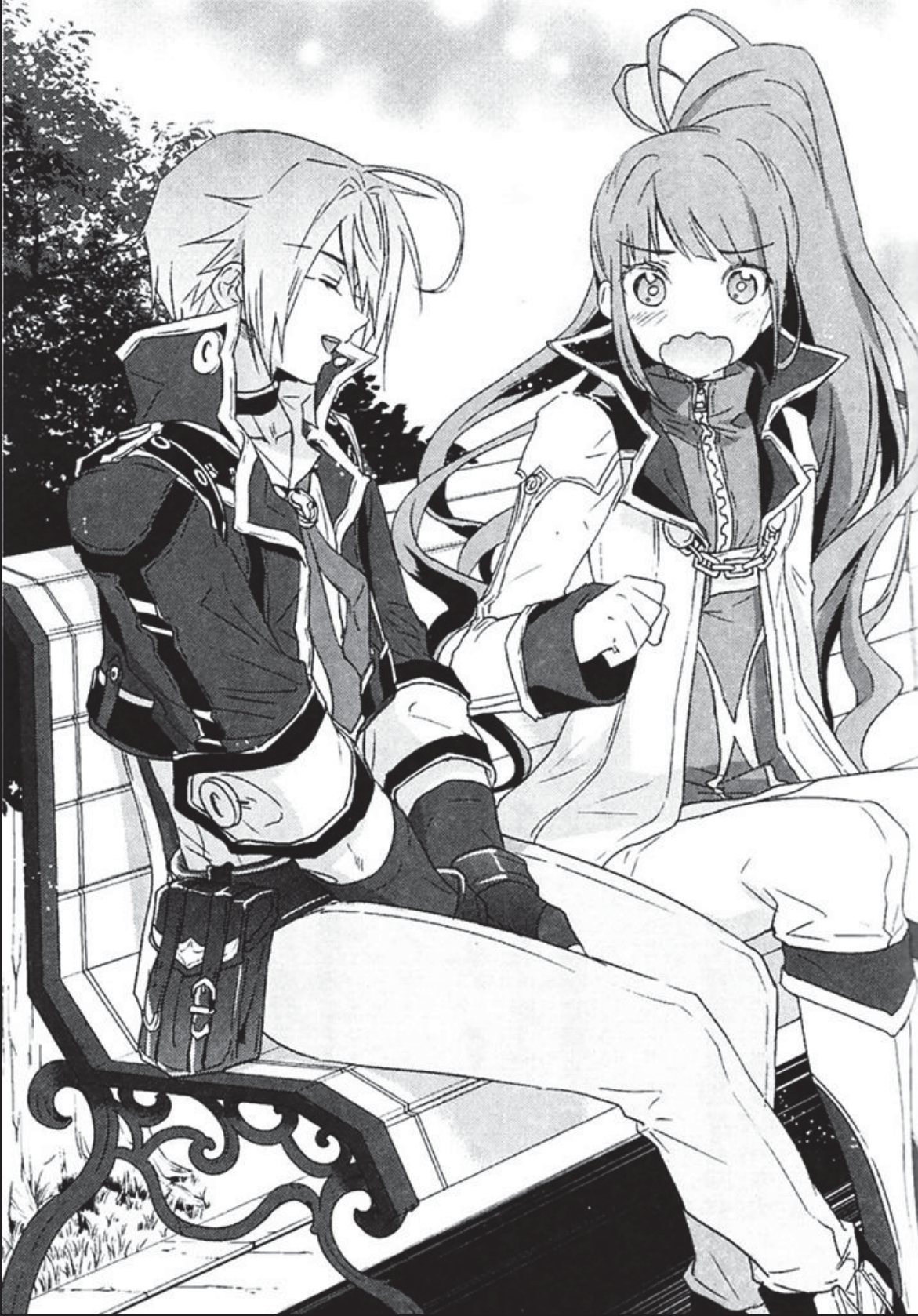
"Then there's no problems here. I want the relationship between the teammates to be built on trust, and not prying deep into one another's heart. Should there be anyone who meddles with the privacy of others, I'll definitely reject him."

"....."

"I am not sure about the secrets that you are holding, but I am not planning to ask, nor will I allow the teammates to do so. Should there be that sort of person..... Hmm? What's wrong? Why are you being so silent all of the sudden—"

"..... Ahaha, ahahahahahaha, ahaha!"

Unable to contain his laughter any longer, Sheltis laughed so hard his body had curled up into the 'く' character.



"Hey, I am being really serious—"

"Ah, ahaha..... S-Sorry, I have no idea why I am laughing as well..... It's probably because I am feeling really happy right now."

He gently brushed away the tears at the corner of his eyes.

He never thought there would be someone who is so passionate about getting him into her team.

Despite being exiled once by *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*>, and also the fact that he is carrying the curse of mateki in his body, there is actually someone who wants him. Upon realizing that fact, his body relaxed immediately, and what followed next was the urge to laugh out loudly.

"Geez. Is the condition of your head injuries actually worsening?"

Monica stared at him with a dumbfounded expression and gave a sigh.

"Maybe. Mmm, thanks to you, I feel much better now all of the sudden."

..... If the person is Monica.

Despite the mateki in him, he wants to repay her trust. That was his heartfelt feelings.

"Well then. I'll be in your care from now on, Monica."

"Y-Yeah. It is me, the newbie, who needs your assistance."

She was a little shy and a little embarrassed at the same time.

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

Monica replied in stutters without knowing what sort of expression she should be putting on.

"I am really sorry though. You have finally got the team running, and yet I am still recuperating from my injuries."

"One week passes by really quickly. Moreover, there's a bunch of procedures that I will have to take care of first. For instance, I'll have to register the new team at the Law Enforcement Bureau, apply for the communication frequencies for our team, and so on. But most importantly, we have to get one more team member."

The subjugation of the harmful beasts, protecting the VIPs as well as investigating the *Floating Archipelagos* <Lagoon>.

All missions issued by *Tenketsu Palace* <Sophia>, including those from the Law Enforcement Bureau, generally require the teams to have at least three people - which means himself, Monica and one other person. Though they can get a temporary member for the missions if it is something really urgent, for the sake of the stability of the team, it is still better for them to get a fixed teammate.

"I have no idea who to get. What about you, Monica?"

"I have someone in mind. I'll say this first though - that someone is a little strange. That person has no desire of being promoted to a regular guard despite being in the lowest rank of the cadet guards. Why don't I introduce you to that person right now?"

With that, Monica began to move. From the direction in which she was heading to, it seemed like she was not walking towards the training grounds. Instead, she was heading to the main path which will lead them to *Tenketsu Palace* <Sophia>.

"Urm, what's the reason for that person not wanting to promote to a regular guard?"

"In the words of that girl, it's 'because it is a part-time job'. She only trains for about ten days a month, and the rest of the days are spent on her main job, which is research. She is in the computer development division of Towers Control, which is the division in charge of controls management."

"So she's a girl..... and from Towers Control?"

Sounds like he had heard it from somewhere.

Computer development division of Towers Control — he was very clear about that. Back when he was searching for Kagura who was recommended to him by Eyriey via the electronic name list, there are two people who fits the criteria. One of them is a cadet guard, while the other belongs to the division which Monica was talking about.

Meaning, they are both the same person?

"Did that person participate in some sort of calculator contest held by the Mechanical Bureau before?"

"You know Kagura?"

Monica turned her head around swiftly in surprise.

"Whoa! So it is really her. Well..... I do know her, but I have never seen her before."

"I am sorry, but I have no idea what's the relationship between you two."

"..... Seems like I'll have to explain everything from the beginning."

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

Sheltis shrugged and flashed a wry smile while looking at Monica, who was all confused.

"Investigate on the patterns to Yuugenshu's appearance? So that's the reason Eyriey introduced Kagura to you?"

Monica was crossing her arms while walking on the floors of *Tenketsu Palace* <Sophia>.

"Mmm. So what is she like?"

"From what I know about her? She's a petite girl in terms of looks. Not good at sports, and her age is probably somewhere around sixteen. She is not used to looking into the eyes of the person whom she is talking to, so she is always looking at the computer screens instead. She has a strange personality, but possesses exceptional talent when it comes to numbers and machines."

"..... Sounds like someone who is hard to get along with. I wonder if she will be willing to accept my request."

"It will depends on how you go about doing it."

After turning past the corner with quick steps, Monica continued,

"Her interests is to gather data. Once she gets interested in someone, she will take the initiative and approach them regardless of whether they are the clerical staff or her fellow squad mates. For example, she'll go, 'You are Monica Esperanto, right? I am very interested in you, so please answer my questions'. So long as you answer her questions, she'll help you in exchange for that."

"..... Seems like she is someone who is really difficult to handle."

You will get used to it — Monica smiled wryly as they continued to chat while walking.

"That was how I got to know her. Kagura asked me several questions for quite a few times, probably because she found my history to be really interesting. That was how we got close to each other."

Monica is someone who converted her class from an apprentice-Priestess to a cadet guard. There should be lots of people who will be interested in her should they get to know of her past, and not just Kagura alone.

"So you answered her truthfully?"

"That's right. She is strange, but she speaks in a very serious manner. I am very satisfied about the results, since we managed to become friends."

"Thank you, Monica. You are always honest and thorough in your answers towards my questions."

"From my judgement, you are a person whom I can trust. Please look for me should you face any troubles, okay? I will do my best to assist you."

"That's pretty touching. But she is becoming more and more unfathomable as you speak."

Considering her personality, he could imagine Monica being especially patient towards Kagura's questions.

But it sounds a little too exaggerating for Kagura to declare Monica as 'a person whom I can trust'. And judging from her next line,

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

'Please look for me should you face any troubles, okay' - isn't her change in attitude a little too quick?

"It's because she is a human subspecies. Do you know about the Nell?"

"The 'People of Nell' who lives in the Northern clusters of the *Floating Archipelagos* <Lagoon>?"

On the *Floating Archipelagos* <Lagoon> away from the floating continent, lives many human subspecies, and they formed their own cultures over time. One of the groups are the 'People of Nell', and some of them are actually serving in *Tenketsu Palace* <Sophia> as well.

"I remember them being a race that is incredibly strong in mathematics, right? For example, they are knowledgeable in the complex movements of the heavenly bodies, or they can formulate equations from the laws of nature and integrate them into their calendar."

"Seems like it. And Kagura appears to be one of the most capable of her race..... and there's something important to take note: she has inherited one of their other unique traits as well."

Monica gave a small shrug as she continued walking. Sheltis nodded his head in agreement as he looked on from her side.

"The people of Nell are incredibly mistrusting."

The people of Neil are born with incredible mathematical talents. At the same time, they are very mistrusting towards others. They will never open themselves to people whom they are seeing for the very first time, and adopt a cold attitude when doing so. On the other hand, they will become incredibly sincere and warm towards those who deserves their trust.

Monica is deemed by Kagura as 'someone trustworthy'.

"So in another words, I will have to first answer her questions or help her out to gain a certain amount of trust from her before I can get Kagura's assistance?"

"Yes. In any case, let's pay her a visit. I'll try asking her."

The first story of *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*>. Monica quickly walked past the main foyer that was filled with visitors and the waiting crowd. She was not heading towards the middle area where the central elevators are located, but a small high-speed elevator located somewhere on the first floor. That elevator is used specially for getting to high places that are at two hundred stories and above.

"The computer development division of Towers Control is located on the two hundred and nineteenth story."

Monica said that as she stared at the scenery on the other side of the reinforced glass.

As the elevator began to move, the scenery outside turned into a blur.

—ding

The sound of a bell rang, and the elevator stopped.

"Speaking of which, I rarely come to the Towers Control. How about you, Monica?"

"It's the same for me, so I can only bring you to Kagura's research laboratory..... Don't get yourself separated from me, as it is difficult to search for people in here."

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

"Ah, w-wait! You're walking too fast, Monica!"

He increased his speed to catch up to Monica, who was already ahead of him.

..... If only Ilis is around. He would not get lost.

He never thought he would come to miss the benefits brought to him by the *machine crystal* <Ilis> - who has the interiors of the towers well within her grasp - that quickly.

After making a few more turns as well as passing by countless clerical staffs—

"Here we are."

Monica suddenly stopped in her tracks.

What appeared before him was a silvery-grey mechanical door. As the doors of the rooms at either sides were painted in warm colors, the grey door gives one the impression that it will lead the user into another dimension.

"This is....."

"A mechanical door made by Kagura herself. According to her, it is equipped with a surveillance camera, fingerprint recognition, voice recognition, vein mapping and so on. Basically, she has installed all the possible safety features that came to her mind."

He had no idea if that was due to the mistrusting nature of the people of Nell, or was it purely for protecting the secrets in the lab. In any case, one could clearly see the some of the personalities of Kagura from the door alone.

"Kagura. It's me."

Monica stretched out her hand to touch a blue sphere on the door. The sphere was flashing at high speed, as though it was checking something.

The sound of a *beep* came a few seconds later, and the door opened slowly towards both sides.

It was a dark room.

Shelts took a step into the room, and realized there was barely any lighting inside. The only illumination in the room was the faint glows coming from the three huge giant screens that were encased onto the wall.

And at the center of the room, was its owner staring at the middle screen.

"It's been a while, Monica. And also, it's the first time I am meeting you, Sheltis Magna Yehle."

The girl turned her chair around to face them.

"You know me?"

"Collecting data is an interest of mine. I dare say that I possess a greater volume of data as compared to *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*>'s data vault. And they are much more accurate too."

Kagura told him in all seriousness.

Actually, they could not see her true expressions at all. She was wearing a mechanical helmet with a visor, and the only way to guess her expressions was via the movements of her mouth.

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

"Monica, are you here to discuss about the formation of the team which you had talked about earlier?"

"Actually, there is another thing as well. I hope you can investigate something for me."

"If the subject is something that interests me."

"It's about the Yuugenshu."

Kagura's lips tightened into a straight line when she heard that.

"..... Carry on."

"*Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>* are in possession of data on where the Yuugenshu will appear on the floating continent. From these data, we will like to know if there is any patterns to the appearance of the Yuugenshu. It's not about the probability of their appearances, but rather, we wish to get hold of how their movements."

"This is quite a difficult request, and the difficulty lies in the point that even if we can filter out the data, we have no way of proving if the results are accurate or not. As such, this idea is pretty much still in its infancy."

"We can take care of that. Should you be able to filter it out successfully, we are willing to investigate the different areas of the floating continent based on the pattern that is discovered."

"..... I see."

Kagura became silent.

After a while, she raised up her head as she thought of something.

"Monica, this idea is extreme and very flexible at the same time, so

it should not be from you — is it your idea, Sheltis?"

He could clearly feel the gaze of Kagura through her visor.

Her gaze was not locked on Monica, but onto himself.

"So?"

"..... Mmm."

He could only nod his head in admission, as there was no way he could hid it from her any longer.

"Monica should have told you about me being one of the people of Nell. We are a race that are timid and shy. I am not an easygoing person, so I will not usually agree to help someone whom I am meeting for the very first time..... However, I have been interested about you since a while back, just like how I used to be interested in Monica. Therefore—"

"You have a condition, right?"

Sheltis replied before her.

— Monica was right.

Prior to gaining her trust, he would have to accept her conditions before he could raise his own requests.

"Yes. Please answer this question of mine. You will pass if you can answer it, and I will respond to your request sincerely."

"Just a question?"

"Yes. I have no other conditions."

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

..... Was it because of Monica that she was being easy on him?

He should be easy to answer her right on the spot if it was just one question. Just as he relaxed his body—

"Where and what are you doing three years and two years ago?"



GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

..... Eh?

He could feel a sudden chill down his spine. A chill which he had never experienced before, and one that surpassed any fear.

Three years ago was the time when he had fallen into the *Garden of Corrupted Song* <Eden>.

And two years ago was when he was exiled from *Tenketsu Palace* <Sophia>.

"..... What do you..... mean by that?"

"Just like what I had said. Please tell me the incidents that has left the deepest impression in you three years and two years ago. Don't tell me you have forgotten them?"

Kagura's tone was incredibly calm and unchanging like a machine. However, her words sounded undeniably sharp and cold to his ears, just like icicles.

— Sweat streaked past his cheeks.

He could finally understand the meaning behind the words that she had said at the beginning.

"Collecting data is an interest of mine. I dare say that I possess a greater volume of data as compared to *Tenketsu Palace* <Sophia>'s data vault. And they are much more accurate too."

The data detailing everything about him up to three years ago that was deleted off from *Tenketsu Palace* <Sophia> — could someone have duplicated the data and kept it for their own use?

..... If there is a copy of my data of three years ago.

..... This means that Kagura has been suspicious of me right from the very beginning.

She was suspicious of the twin swords wielder named Sheltis.

She suspected that Sheltis and the person who had died three years ago after falling into the *Garden of Corrupted Song* <Eden> could be the same person.

"Are you unable to tell me? My question should not be a difficult one to answer."

"....."

There was no way he could say it.

He is a heretic who was infected with mateki after falling into the *Garden of Corrupted Song* <Eden>. *Tenketsu Palace* <Sophia> will definitely be thrown into chaos should they come to know about how a person like him is undertaking the role of a guard here.

And should he spark a huge uproar, he will definitely be exiled from the place permanently. More importantly, he will never get to fulfill his promise to become Ymy's Sennenshi.

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

"..... Can you change your question to something else?"

"Sorry, but this is the only question that I want to ask."

Monica took a step towards Kagura, who was putting on an aggressive tone.

"Kagura, this is not like you."

Her voice was calm and strong at the same time, just like the surface of a frozen mirror.

"I do not know your reason for this, but can't you be more flexible and change the question?"

"I can be very obstinate at times. Moreover, what I am doing may be for your own good, Monica."

"? What—"

Just as Monica was narrowing her eyes in surprise.

"Hey— Is Kagura around—? Please give me an answer regardless of whether you are in there or not—!"

The mechanical door opened all of the sudden, and a girl in overalls with fluffy orange hair walked straight into the room.

"Eyriey?"

"Ah, so Sheltis is here too. What, I was thinking that you may not

be able to find Kagura, so here I am talking a look at the situation. Ah, so Monica's here as well. Long time no see—"

Eyriey was originally heading to the upper levels of the tower along with the *machine crystal* <Ilis>. She happily waved her hands in the direction of Monica before turning her body to face the owner of the room.

"..... So it's Eyriey."

The edges of Kagura's lips broke into a slight smile.

That was the first time the girl was putting on such an expression.

"So you knew both Sheltis and Monica? What a problem..... I never expect the you to be the cause of all these things."

"Hmm? But all I did is to introduce Sheltis to you."

"That's what I meant!"

Kagura suddenly threw a tantrum for some unknown reason.

"Well well. Let's put that aside for now. How's things going for you, Sheltis? Are you successful with the negotiations?"

"Urm..... Well..... Nope."

"Oh—"

Eyriey shot a meaningful glance at Kagura.

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

"Well, Kagura is busy most of the time. I see, I guess it's better if I am in charge of this. After I am done with the matters of the *machine crystal* <Ilis>—"

"P-Please hold on a second, Eyriey."

Kagura stood up hurriedly.

She was a lot shorter than Eyriey. Out of the people Sheltis knew, she is probably of about the same height as Syun-rei. Even after taking into consideration that she is a girl, her stature is petite in comparison.

"I never expect this..... that you have actually involved yourself in the analysis to the possible regularity in the appearance of Yuugenshu."

"Actually, I am the one whom Sheltis approached immediately. I was busy then, so I asked him to seek your assistance instead. But since the negotiation is not done yet, I might as well—"

"D-Didn't I ask you to hold on a second!?"

Kagura wove her fists about and yelled.

"Sheltis..... though I am very unwilling, I will agree to your earlier request."

"Eh? But....."

He had yet to answer the question in exchange for her assistance.

"It's fine. I have already found what I should be doing, and it had appeared right before me."

She stared hard at Eyriey and pointed in the direction of her nose. It was as though she was not even paying any attention to Sheltis.

"Listen up, Eyriey - let's have a showdown between us! We shall see who can correctly churn out the patterns behind the appearance of the Yuugenshu!"

"Hmm? What? I have no idea what's going on, but I guess I'll accept your challenge."

Eyriey agreed readily despite her being all confused about the situation. On the other hand, Kagura was putting on a sinister smile on her face.

"..... Fufufu, I will definitely show you my skills this time round. With the pride of the people of Nell on the line, I will definitely not lose to you, a representative of the human race!"

"Eh? I am representing the human race here? How very embarrassing."

"What's there to be embarrassed about!? You should be showing some nervousness at the very least— Ah....."

Perhaps she had finally noticed.

Kagura turned her body away awkwardly, and cleared her throat.

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

"Ahem. In any case, leave that to me."

"..... Right."

"A-Alright, you can leave! Eyriey too, please leave this room immediately. Since it has already been decided, I'll like to be alone so that I can focus."

— What's going on here?

Sheltis and Monica glanced at each other while Kagura was shoving them away.

"So Kagura's willing to help. That means everything is settled peacefully?"

After the mechanical door was shut, Eyriey turned around to face them.

"I can focus all of my attention on the *machine crystal* <Ilis>, and Sheltis can finally relax himself and recuperate."

"That's how it is, but it seemed like we had caused some troubles for you, no? Kagura suddenly issued you a challenge out of the blue. What's with that?"

"Ah— I am already used to that."

Eyriey's laughter echoed in the corridor.

"She may not look it like, but that girl hates losing. Whenever she

feels like it, she will always come and 'challenge me to a showdown', whether it is things like guessing the winning digits to the lottery, or predicting the amount of rainfall. Generally speaking, all challenges are in the areas of numbers or machines, and that has been the way ever since our very first encounter. But that's fine, since it is rather interesting."

"I have finally seen another side of her as well."

Next to Eyriey, Monica was nodding her head repeatedly.

"That was the first time I see Kagura being that stirred up. Did you win all the challenges, Eyriey?"

"Nope. I was losing all the way—"

..... Eyriey lost?

Eyriey possesses an incredible amount of knowledge as well as skills when it comes to machines. Even after knowing her for two years while staying at the living sector, Sheltis has barely seen the real capabilities of Eyriey. The *machine crystal* <Ilis> was also deeply impressed by her techniques when she was hacking the main computers of *Tenketsu Palace* <Sophia>. There should be no doubt about her talents.

And now, there is actually a mechanic who is of the same age as Eyriey, who is even more skilled than her? Sheltis couldn't quite believe that right away.

"That means Kagura is better than Eyriey?"

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

"How should I put it? Hmm— she should be very strong? Isn't that fine? I have never put any thought into this. Why don't you ask her directly?"

Eyriey pointed towards the mechanical door. Compared to the emotional Kagura, Eyriey was relaxed and at ease throughout the whole thing.

"I do want to, but I will probably be yelled at by her should I enter her room now."

Monica smiled wryly.

"Let us head back for now. We will attract the attention of others should we stay here any longer, since we are cadet guards. Also, Instructor Yumelda will be angry should I not head back for my training soon."

* * *

— Before her was a passageway made of ice walls that was giving an azure brilliance.

..... It's cold.

Cold that was beyond iciness. No— it had surpassed the limits to her body's sense of touch. All she could feel was pain on her exposed skin.

It was a world of ice that extends outwards endlessly - there were no ceilings nor the normal walls.

Two hundred and ninety first story of *Tenketsu Palace* <Sophia>, the highest story which is named as <<Paradise>>. Different from the stories below it, it would be more adequate to say that this place is of another world.

There were no shelter above her, only light that seemed to come from the white night.

Beneath the brilliant lights was a scene of erected azure ice walls that stretches on forever. The surfaces of the ice walls were crystal clear and more dazzling than any other crystals. It's like mirrors that are showing the reflections of the world.

Her breaths.

The warmth of her body.

Everything was frozen in this world. And that includes her memories and her conscience.

It is pointless to wear any winter clothing here. All living things, all objects and even the Yuugenshu. It is a barrier that freezes everything and seals their soul and time — Hyouketsu Kyoukai.

"Ah— it hurts. It's cold and it hurts."

Meimel was wearing just her vestment as she walked in the frozen world.

The colors of her feet which walked on the frozen floors were pale from the lack of blood. The sharp ice shards scratched her skin,

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

which resulted in tiny traces of blood on the places where she stepped on.

However, her expressions remained composed. She was even putting on a smile.

It was not that she could feel no pain, nor was it because she was showing no reaction to the iciness. As of now, her lips were purple and her shoulders and fingers were trembling non-stop.

Even so, the Priestess' expressions were at ease as she continued walking in the frozen world.

"Allow your heart to calm down. You must be more tranquil than the huge trees that were rooted for over hundreds of years, or the giant boulders erected at the faraway canyons. Your heart must be burning with a will that is stronger than anyone else."

She had already said those lines to her junior Priestesses for countless number of times, and she herself does follow strictly to what she preaches as well.

Tranquil Heart.

All the pains that one is experiencing on her body, as well as the corrosion of her mental wellness. Even if she has lost her rationality, and even if she collapses from a mental breakdown, she will continue praying for the barrier.

That is the culmination for a Priestess.

And the one who portrays that culmination is the second Priestess, Meimel in Carnation.

"Meimel is here, your Highness."

She had reached the center of <<Paradise>>.

In the middle of what seemed like a giant pool of steam waters, was an incredibly large azure ice crystal. A woman was sealed in the center of the clear crystal.

One could faintly see the pure white vestment which the woman wearing deep in the azure ice.

Queen Salah.

She is someone who sacrifices her body into the azure ice which freezes everything, and prays continuously for Hyouketsu Kyoukai by herself.

"Well then, Queen Salah—"

She stretched out her fingers to touch the azure ice crystal.

phia-So la telah sitra

<*The triangular door shall light up our prayers*>

She said the opening prologue. Her words were filled with the power of shinryoku that was released from her own body.

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

"As of now, I shall take over Hyouketsu Kyoukai for the next three days."

The remains of her shinryoku transformed into a light barrier. The azure light enveloped the whole of Meimel's body. It was as though those light was a supreme sacred-raiment that was made out of azure threads.



GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

And next.

As she coordinated herself to the singing voice of the Queen,
Meimel began to sing with her own voice as well.

Yu/ Uhw =C r-sanc uc Eden

<Under the foils of the slumbering Eden>

term-l-pile xel, xin, ole fusen elchel

<The falling stars, time and dreams covered the eyes and faces>

Shinryoku <melody> — 'Seventh Heaven Rhythm <Sophia Code>'.

A mysterious melody which maintains Hyouketsu Kyoukai, it's a
song of prayer that is passed down only to the Priestesses of
Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>.

xearcs let laphin yahe, bie omia hec lihit clar

*<There is no key to the doors-of-speech which is sketched by the
transparent fingertip>*

noi-roo-xin, noi melras I noe-l-habes pianic cia eyen

*<In the never-ending world, the jade-like phantoms had stopped
their laments>*

It was at that very instant.

It is incredibly difficult to reach the instance where the two singing voices resonate, but it was the point where it sounded especially beautiful — and that is why Meimel loves the arrival of that very instance the most.

The feeling of the tone ringing in the cold and yet clear world of their throbbing souls.

=C hypn phenoria, Eec qhaon nes ei getie, nephies paf lef bis cley
kis ei roos

*<Sleep, children. Your wings are still young, and branches of safety
are still too far away>*

=C hypn phenoria, Eec wat nes ei getie bies killis cley kis ei mihas
*<Sleep, children. Your feet are still weak, and this frozen land is
still too painful>*

She closed both of her eyes.

Meimel sunk even deeper into the hard and transparent azure ice crystals.

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

{2}

"..... Everyone's working really hard."

Sheltis stared at the training while sitting on the bench located at the outdoor training fields.

It was the team battles between the cadet guards.

A team of two great sword wielders were fighting against an archer and a heavy gunner in the artificial desert terrain. At the forest terrains further away, the cadet guard with throwing knives was up against a dual sword wielder.

Mock bullets were used for the guns, while the swords had their edges removed. However, the fights were no less intense than actual battles.

"You seemed pretty bored, Sheltis."

Instructor Yumelda walked towards him while stomping on the sands. She was wearing a blue suit without creases, and the cigarette in her mouth was still emitting swirling smoke.

"Get yourself up immediately. You'll be up next for the team battle."

"..... I am still recuperating."

"I know that. It's just a joke."

The instructor said that as she looked at the slowly rising smoke. Contrary to her words, her expressions were serious and the tone of her voice did not sound like she was joking.

"So when will you recover?"

"I should be able to resume training next week."

The cigarette which was thin like a needle was twirling about in the instructor's fingers. With his eyes chasing the path of the spinning cigarette, Sheltis told her just as how he was instructed by the doctor.

"Next week? That's boring."

"..... You know, I do hope you can show some sympathy to a patient who is still in his recovery."

"That's not what I meant. I was planning to get you on a mission."

The instructor sat on the bench. Her gaze were sharp as thorns.

"Fourteen hours ago, we lost contact with a group of cadet guards that were sent to patrol the nature sector."

"..... Was there an accident?"

"It all started when we did not receive a scheduled response from the team despite it being way past the zero hours. In accordance to paragraph four of article number fifty eight of the Tower's Law, we issued orders for a team of cadres guards to be on standby. As

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

we were still unable to come into contact with them three hours later, we had deemed them to be in some sort of trouble. Four hours after that, which is seven o'clock this morning, six elites of the cadet guards were chosen to form a rescue team, and were dispatched to investigate on the matter."

It's something that happens every year — the instructor lifted her head to look at the rising cigarette smoke as she murmured those words.

"I think you should know this as well, but such things will happen every year. It could be a malfunctioning of the communication devices, the encountering of a Yuugenshu..... there are plenty of causes, but we do manage to rescue them successfully for most of the cases. I was originally planning to draft you into the rescue team."

"You are planning to recommend me?"

There is only one condition to be successfully drafted into a rescue team, and that is exceptional performance."

Should the capabilities of the rescue team be too weak, they will just end up in the same situation of the predecessors. To prevent that from occurring, it is stipulated that the rescue team must be made up of outstanding cadet guards that were drafted in by the instructors personally.

"I won't deny the fact that I do think highly of you, but there is another reason for me to recommend you this time round."

"Another reason?"

"It's the injuries on your head. I have no idea how you get yourself injured like that, but it does not seem minor, am I right? In other words, you may become the next person to be in the KIA list if you were unlucky. I had thinking of making you see look at those involved in an accident, so that you can learn a lesson or two from them."

If something was to go wrongly, he could very well be the next person to appear on the KIA list.

He had personally witnessed the scenes of accidents before, so he could understand how horrible it is. He reminded himself that he must never make the same mistakes.

"I will be more careful from now on."

"Of course."

Her tone was cold and straightforward, as per usual. However, there some other expressions mixed in to the stern face that the instructor usually wears.

Silence fall upon the bench—

"Ah— finally! I've found you!"

However, that was immediately broken by the shouts of a girl.

"I'sa, it's fine for you to appear all of the sudden, but can calm yourself down?"

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

"Ah..... Uhhhh. Sorry for my interruption, Instructor Yumelda. It's a pleasure to see you here."

The girl pinched the edges of her skirt and bowed respectfully.

She was a girl with golden twintails which was shimmering brightly under the rays of the sun. She was wearing a pure white ceremonial clothing, but the bottom half was replaced with a skirt instead. On her left shoulder was the badge of a regular guard.

"Eh? That girl from before?"

Sheltis blinked in surprise when he saw the familiar person.

It was something that happened two weeks ago. She was one of the two regular guards who were his and Monica's opponents during the team battles. If he remember right, her name is.....

"I am I'sa Isu Ishmeal, a regular guard who uses shinryoku-arts. My *class <type>* is a 'puppeteer'..... Don't tell me you have forgotten me already?"

The young girl flashed a proud smile.

"I do remember. So, do you have any business with me?"

"Of course! I want to have my revenge for our last fight!"

The young girl pointed her finger in Sheltis' direction as her hair and skirt swayed in her movements.

"Calm down, I'sa. You are not making sense."

Just then, a stout dual gunner suddenly grabbed her by her arm. Sheltis recognized him as well. He was the regular guard whom I'sa paired up with. He remembered that his name is 'Jin'.

"Urm, you two are the opponents whom I had faced back during the team battles, right?"

"It's great that you can remember us. We have learned our lessons from our last defeat, so we want to request for a rematch."

Contrary to I'sa, Jin was calm and composed.

"Fu fu fu, we'll not lose to you this time round. Since that last defeat, I requested my Onee-sama to conduct some special training for me. Wait till you see the new frontiers that I reached after much difficulty—"

"It's not referring to how the control over the number of 'puppets' have increased from four to five, or something along those lines. Right?"

"..... Ehheheh!?"

Upon hearing those murmurs of Sheltis, I'sa pressed her hands against her chest and straightened herself as though she was struck by lightning.

..... Eh, so I actually guessed it right?

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

The four huge metal balls which floated around her. He was just randomly saying how the numbers have increased from the previous four to five.

"J-Jin, this is not good! This person here actually knew about my secret techniques! What should we do? He must have seen through your plan of using the dual pistols at close range as well!"

"..... Why are you revealing my secret plans?"

"But....."

The young girl was complaining to the dual gunner with teary eyes.

As for the person who was being complained to, he looked like he was already used it.

"Don't you think it's about time you two stop with your couple's acts?"

The slightly dumbfounded instructor crushed the empty cigarette box with her bare hand.

"Sorry for the wasted trip. You two came at the wrong time today."

"Eh? Why?"

"That's because this idiot had injured himself while on a mission, and is currently recuperating."

"Eh——!?"

The girl let out another loud scream yet again.

"What are you doing, you idiot!? Do you know how tough it was for me everyday back when I was training together with my Onee-sama!? T-To think that——!"

"Why is everyone calling me an idiot!?"

First Monica, then the instructor, and now this girl here.

Why? He had done nothing bad, and yet he was called by others as 'idiot' recently.

"What to do? I deliberately skipped training to come here. I wonder what will Boss say if she comes to know of this."

..... Boss?

"She's the captain of the Second Lions Squad. Actually, it will be more appropriate for me to say 'Sennenshi' instead..... Crap, I guess I'll just lie and say that Instructor Yumelda had asked me to assist her in the training. I'll pretend that I have to fight against the cadet guards——"

"Yo, I'sa."

A hand appeared on I'sa's shoulder before she could finish her sentence.

"You know, what were you saying about how it's bad if I come to know of something?"

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

"Whoaaaaaa..... C-Captain Run.....? W-Why..... are you here?"

"Obviously because I had tailed you two all the way here."

Run — she is the guardian of Priestess Meimel, and is one of the five strongest guards in *Tenketsu Palace* <Sophia>.

The badge of Sennenshi was worn on her left shoulder.

Her yellow hair was cut casually, and her amber-colored eyes were like those of a cat. Her pure white ceremonial clothing was designed to be a short sleeved shirt that is paired with short pants, both revealing her tanned limbs.

"So you two skipped training without valid reasons and chose to slack here instead?"

"C-Captain..... my neck, my neck is being strangled..... I cannot breathe!"

..... It's probably a habit of I'sa's.

It seemed like her way of speech will become very polite she is speaking to someone of higher ranking than her.

"Alright, so where's the 'crazily strong cadet guard' who made you two came over here despite your training? I do want to take a look myself since I am already here— Eh?"

Run's eyes opened wide in his direction as she released her hands that were strangling I'sa's neck.

"Oh— isn't this Sheltis? How are you doing? I heard you went to the *Floating Archipelagos* <Lagoon> together with Leon?"

"Whoa! Y-Y-Y-You can't say this here!"

"Oh?"

Run's curious expression was just like those of an inquisitive kitten. Sheltis lowed his voice and said,

"The mission about us going to the *Floating Archipelagos* <Lagoon> is top secret. We can't talk about this here."

"Oh— yeah! Ahaha, I have nearly forgotten that! Sorry."

..... Is that really fine?

Sheltis felt slightly weak when he saw the Sennenshi laughing in a relaxed manner.

Speaking of which. He had met Run for quite a few times already, since she is Meimel's Sennenshi. However, this was the first time he was speaking to her face to face like this.

"I finally get it— I was wondering why I didn't see you recently. So you are still a cadet guard. Which means, the 'crazily strong cadet guard' whom I'sa is talking about is....."

"..... Me?"

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

"Ah— I see. It all makes sense now."

Her gaze alternate between Sheltis and I'sa for quite a few times. She then finally said with a voice full of pity,

"I'sa."

"Yes?"

"It's hopeless. You're still ten years too early for this."

"Ehhhhh!? Whose side is Captain on!? And why are you speaking to him in as if you two are very close to each other? Could it be that Boss actually know this dual sword wielder!?"

"Nope, not at all."

"No way—!? Please do not shift your eyes away, Boss! Just what exactly is the relationship between the both of you!?"

"You are to call me 'Captain', not 'Boss'. Also, is this the attitude that one should be having even after she has skipped her training? Alrght, Jin, take I'sa away."

With that, Run grabbed I'sa with only a single hand.

"..... U..... Whaaa! B-Boss..... please stop! You'll cause my skirt to lift up—"

The girl was tossed high up. Her body soared through the air

before finally landing in front of the dual gunner.

"Understood. Let's get going, I'sa."

"Uhhh..... I'll be leaving, Instructor Yumelda."

Jin nodded his head silently. Having seen the actions taken by Jin, I'sa pinched the two sides of her skirt unwillingly and lowered her head.

"What about you, Run? Don't you need to head back?"

"Ah— me? Well, Meimel will not return for the next three days as she has to maintain the barrier. And since my sparring partner Leon is outside patrolling, my schedule is boringly empty till the evening."

..... She did seemed to be really free.

Run was slumping lazily against the bench. She looked just like a cat which is listless in the summer heat.

"Right, Sheltis, why don't we spar against each other? I'll get bored to death if I don't move about once every hour."

"Why do you make yourself sound like a bunny..... And it's regrettable, but I am still recuperating."

"You're right— okay, I'll just go straight to the point then."

"Is there something you want to say?"

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

"Mmm, I suddenly remember it after seeing you."

Run took out a folded piece of paper from the pocket of her shorts.

"Here. Leon wants you to take a look at this."

* * *

Two hundred and ninety first story of *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*>.

Monica was heading towards her friend's room. On her way there, she passed by many of the staffs from Towers Control who were all walking briskly on the passageway.

"..... It's probably my first time doing this?"

The first time she visited Towers Control twice within the same day.

"Kagura, it's me. Sorry for disturbing you once more."

While standing in front of well guarded door, Monica placed her hand on the blue orb of the scanner.

Lock opened.

The door opened as though it was the sea that was parted into two, revealing the silhouette of her friend.

"It's really rare to have someone visiting my place twice in the same day."

"Are you working?"

"If you are referring to the my from Towers Control, then I have already finished up to two weeks worth of my workload, so there's no need to worry. Also, I am really sorry for not receiving you properly earlier. I should have at least brewed you some tea."

koto — Kagura placed a small bottle on the desk.

It was a capped bottle that is sold in the tower. It will not spill its contents onto the machines should one tip it over accidentally,. There were absolutely no glasses or teacups to be seen in Kagura's room.

"I am sorry for coming here without informing you first."

"Since you are an important friend of mine,"

Kagura turned her chair along with her body to face Monica. She stared straight into her.

"I know the reason for you coming here. It's about the analysis on the possible patterns behind the movements of Yuugenshu. The stuff we talked about in the morning. Right?"

"There's something that really bothers me back then."

As she sat down on the chair offered to her by Kagura, Monica began to recall the exchange a few hours ago.

The meaning behind the question that Kagura raised for Sheltis to answer.

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

"Where and what are you doing three years and two years ago?"

"What are your reasons for asking those questions?"

What was Kagura's intentions for asking those questions?

And also, Sheltis chose to reply with an unnatural silence as well.

"Do you know something about him?"

"....."

Kagura did not answer her directly. Instead,

"Just not too long ago, he was having a friendly conversation with an important someone of *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*> - Sennenshi Run."

"Captain Run and Sheltis?"

Monica is well aware of Kagura's very own information network.

That should not be a mistake. If so, then why does Sheltis, who is a mere cadet guard, knows Run, who is a Sennenshi and holds the absolute rank in *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*>?

— And right after Caption Leon, was Captain Run?

"Monica, don't you find everything about Sheltis strange?"

"..... Please go on."

"Firstly, his abilities are incredible for a new cadet guard who has only been in the palace for a few weeks. You should know this better than anyone else, since you two were together during the team battles."

I'sa and Jin.

Both of them are famous puppeteer and dual gunner among the regular guards. However, that young man had obtained victory almost all by himself. It was at then when Monica finally caught a glimpse of Sheltis' actual strength.

"That's surprising. You are very thorough in the investigation."

"I have installed hidden cameras without prior approval from my superior. There's above ten of them at the training grounds alone. And that includes the shots of you wiping your sweat in the shelter of a tree after training."

"I'm confiscating them."

"I am really sorry, but the CDs and the photos were already all sold out."

"You sold them!?"

"— Let's not talk about that for now. Aside from what I had mentioned earlier, there are also a few other suspicious points."

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

Kagura gave a fake cough.

"What I am most curious about is how his past history is a total blank. The only information I obtained is he was living in the living sector a month ago. On the other hand, he seemed to be an old acquaintance with a few of the Sennenshi. To look into that even deeper, there's also that black coat which he wears..... it looks like something that is modified from the old ceremonial clothes of *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*>. Why does he possess the old ceremonial clothes despite only entering into the palace not too long ago, and why is he insisting on wearing it?"

"So that's your reasons for asking him for his history three years and two years ago?"

It was exactly two and a half years ago when they abolished the old black ceremonial clothes and replaced it with the white ones that Monica was wearing. Should they know what happened before and after that time period, they should be able to guess Sheltis' past.

"And there are other reasons for me to do this as well."

"..... There are still other reasons?"

"Yes. But— just as I had expected, he was unwilling to answer my question. If my speculations are correct, then he....."

Kagura was about to say something, but she snapped back her senses and raised her head. Her mechanical helmet and visor

swayed about her head due to her movements. She then let out a huge sigh.

"No, forget it. It's still too early for me to be making conclusions."

"You can't reveal it even to me?"

"I am doing this because of you in mind, Monica."

..... What does she mean?

Just as Monica was pondering the meaning behind those words, Kagura said,

"In any case— It seems like Sheltis is being ostracized by the other cadet guards. I feel the same way as well. He obviously does not fit into his surroundings. I am interested in him due to the mysteries behind his real identity, but it's another thing altogether if we are to talk about trust. Not only that, I am extremely wary of him."

Sheltis, a dual sword wield whose background is a total mystery.

"..... I guess, since even I do not know everything about him."

The Yuugenshu which was incubated in the facility at the *Floating Archipelagos* <Lagoon>. She had personally witnessed him being perfectly alright despite being coming under direct exposure to the mateki of the enemy. As an ex-apprentice-Priestess, she was really curious as to how Sheltis defended himself against those mateki.

"Maybe. But Monica, do you really trust him and want him into your team?"

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

"Yeah. I wanted to tell you this all along..... I don't know how to explain this, but I think I can trust him."

She was indeed worried about all the secrets that Sheltis is holding. However, she believed that he will definitely tell her everything when the time comes.

"That answer do sound like something you will say..... and it's an answer that I, as a people of Nell, is unable to say. It's something that I am envious of."

Kagura showed a wry smile after a pause.

That was probably something which can't be helped. Kagura is someone who belongs to a race with incredible wariness, and unlike Monica, she did not have any experience of carrying out missions together with Sheltis as well. It was normal for her to see Sheltis as a guy with a shady past.

"And that's the reason why I am keeping my distance away from him..... however, due to the circumstances, I had no choice but to accept his requests. And since it has turned to that, I will work hard to come up with the possible patterns to the movements of the Yuugenshu. I should be able to come up with something substantial by this week."

"Thanks for your help."

"Monica, there is no need for you to thank me, since you are my friend."

It was as if her eyes behind the visor were putting on a smile.

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

{3}

"Mmm—"

Sheltis stared to and fro the ceiling and the piece of paper in his hand as he laid on his bed in his room.

He turned around to lay on his sides, and mumbled,

"..... What a headache."

It's a copy of the official reply from the Government Sector. Something that Leon passed it to Run, who then passed it to him.

The contents had them protesting against *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*>'s unauthorized landing on the *Floating Archipelagos* <*Lagoon*>.

"It's all about them protesting. They did not give any answers to the most important question, which is that of the facility. This is quite unlikely, but since they insisted on not knowing the things that were witnessed personally by the guards of *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*>..... does that mean that the Government Sector is very certain about it?"

The underground facility which was incubating the Yuugenshu.

And also the girl in the image who is surrounded in mystery, and claims herself as the Forbidden Crystal.

Since they were dead set on denying it, it means that they must hold a lot of confidence to do it. However, it is not known if they were really clueless about it, or if they were confident of eliminating the evidence before *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*> could request and start on a new investigation.

..... There would be no way of investigating on this should the evidence be removed.

"Ah— Damn! How can I possibly ignore this!"

It is stated on the official document that they will be holding a conference next month.

The envoys of *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*> will head down to a place prepared by the Government Sector. The reason for Leon to pass him that copy was a message from him asking Sheltis to 'come along as well'.

"..... I'll have to tag along after reading this official document, huh. Damn, I've been had by Leon. I was finding it strange all along - how can he allow a cadet guard to see this classified document!"

He jumped off his bed and stared at the papers in his hand.

"I wonder who else will be going. Me..... and the other witness, Monica? There should also be the upper brass from either Towers Control or General Affairs Council. Then I'll have to add in the cadet guards who will be on a protecting mission, as well as a handful of regular guards, and then....."

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

"Sheltis, you are to head to the outdoor training grounds immediately."

Just as he was about to sort out his thoughts, he was interrupted by an announcement coming from the speakers located in the corner of the ceilings.

"..... I've said this a lot of times already, Instructor Yumelda, but I cannot participate in the trainings—"

"Our dear Priestess is about to give her speech."

The Priestess' speech.

He could not recall any scheduling of such an event.

"It was something decided while you were still hospitalized. You should know that today's the day where the handover ceremony of the barrier will be conducted between the Queen and the Priestess?"

"I do know that."

A change of the prayer. The Queen can only rest for three days every month. The handover ceremony is a ritual to allow the Priestesses to maintain the barrier while the Queen is resting. No one knows what sort of spells are used, or how the ceremony will be conducted. It is something passed down in secret between the Queen and her Priestesses only.

"The ceremony has just ended. Priestess Meimel has successfully took over Hyouketsu Kyoukai. Priestess Ymy will personally relay that news to the public. All staff and guards of *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*> are to gather at the outdoors training grounds."

The Priestess will relay the news to everyone in *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*>.

— And Ymy's the one doing it?

"I heard it is something decided during the directors meeting. There are many people in *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*>, as well as those residents of the living sector, who are worried about how the infiltration of the Yuugenshu will happen once more. This is a measure taken to quell the fears in them. Now stop wasting time and get here immediately. Lateness will not be tolerated."

"Eh? Ah, wait, Instructor..... Geez, why can't she tell me that sooner?"

He sighed in the direction of the silent speakers.

After slowly expelling the air in his lungs, Sheltis stopped lying on his back and got to his feet.

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

"There's over a thousand guards, and there should be more than ten thousand working staff in *Tenketsu Palace* <Sophia>..... That's a really incredible number."

Probably not everyone will be attending this, but the number of participants should be somewhere in the thousands.

It should be difficult to stand in front of that many people. Moreover, the person who will be doing so is none other than his childhood friend.

..... The Ymy whom I know will probably be too nervous to speak.

Standing in front of the public, and tasked with the responsibility of protecting the floating continent.

That's what a Priestess is.

"The Ymy whom I am not familiar with..... huh?"

Despite being very happy to be able to see Ymy's taking on an active role as a Priestess, Sheltis could not help but to be depressed by how out of reach she had become.

Sheltis left his room with those conflicting feelings in him.

The madder-red colored sky.

The sun at the edges of the sky was about to sink into the other side of the horizon. It painted the colors of the yellowish dusk on the canvas made out of the sky.

"..... So it's already evening."

Sheltis looked up into the sky as he walked on the paved roads.

It was back in the morning when he visited Kagura together with Monica. He then met the puppeteer and the dual gunner slightly after noon. After reading the report which he obtained from Run, it was already evening before he knew it.

— But, are we really gathering at the outdoor training grounds?

It is probably the only place that can fit everyone from *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*>. However, his current impression of the place was still fixed at the scene where the guards were all focused on their training back in the day.

"Ah, considering the personality of Instructor Yumelda, she had probably concentrated all the training in the day, as she cannot use the training grounds in the evening..... Mmm, that is most probably what happened. Or rather, that's the only possible scenario. Am I right, Ilis—"

Just as he was about to speak to the *machine crystal* <*Ilis*> which was hanging before his chest, Sheltis finally came to his senses.

— Oh right, I have already handed Ilis to Eyriey for the check.

There was no one who can reply him. And that was the first time

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

he realized that.

All that was missing was something which he had taken granted for - the truth is, he could not get used to not hearing the voice of the *machine crystal* <Ilis>.

"..... Ah— mmm. In any case, I hope Ilis' check-up will be completed successfully."

While thinking of that, he walked past the paved roads and made his way to the turfs. It was then when he heard the sounds coming from the huge crowd.

"This is.....?"

Countless conversations. Sounds of the shoes. The rubbing of clothes.

All the sounds mixed up together and reverberated beneath the skies of dusk which was originally enveloped by silence. He was a considerable distance away from the training grounds, and yet he could already hear those noise from his place.

In another words, there were already that many people at the training grounds?

"Shit, has it started already?"

He quickly ran through the turfs under the urge of his accelerating heartbeats, and made his way to the training area where the ground was filled with fine sand. Finally, after making past the

barrier erected out of metal wires,

"..... Ah."

Sheltis was awestruck by the scene before him, which made him stopped in his tracks subconsciously.

The training ground was already dyed red due to the brilliant rays of the madder-red colored sun of dusk.

The gigantic area was filled to the brim with people.

Male staff in their suits and with a employment pass hanging from their necks; the female attendants in charge of servicing the Priestesses; also, there were the directors of the various bureaus in the tower. Further on were the faces of the fellow cadet guards whom he was already familiar with. Standing behind them were the elite guards — the elites who are candidates to be the next Sennenshi.

"..... That's quite a sight."

He had never seen such a scene before.

"You are one hundred and seventy seconds late."

Came the voice from behind.

"I have already made it here in haste."

He turned around. As expected, the voice did come from Instructor Yumelda.

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

She was not biting on to a stick of cigarette, probably in consideration for the crowds. Instead, she put on some purple lipstick, which made her look especially striking.

"Maybe. My estimation was that you will be late for roughly two hundred seconds."

"It is an important event."

"You think you are here to protect her? I am sorry to say this, but there is no room for you cadet guards to show your worth here. The responsibility of protecting the Priestess is all handled by regular guards and above."

"Ah, no..... That's not what I meant."

"Hmm? Whatever. That does not matter."

The instructor said that with a meaningful tone. From the looks of how she was silently crossing her arms, it seemed like she will not ask him any more questions. And after shifting his sight away from her slightly—

"It is indeed..... a really important event."

Sheltis bit on his lower lips softly and said that with an almost inaudible voice.

— I want to know the Priestess side of Ymy as well.

This was something Monica told him before.

"A Sennenshi cannot just protect a Priestess. Only when a person can fully understand the pain and loneliness of a Priestess' training, as well as understand the importance of reducing those emotions, will he be qualified to take on the role of a Sennenshi."

Sheltis is confident of knowing Ymy better than anyone else, if it is about the side of her as his childhood friend.

However, that does not give him enough qualification to become her Sennenshi. In order to protect Priestess Ymy, he will have to understand the Priestess side of her as well.

..... And that is exactly what I am lacking right now.

"Oh, it's about time."

Instructor Yumelda pointed towards the glass dome that was situated in the center of the training grounds.

The dome was made out of translucent fortified glass. It is the place used whenever they are holding a major competition with spectators involved. It is also the most conspicuous building within the training grounds.

..... It's where Monica and I took part in the team battle.

Back then, the interiors were set to be of a rocky terrain. As of now, the floor was paved with a simple carpet, and on it was a small

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

platform along with a microphone on its stand.

And next, the surroundings became silent.

The noise which he was hearing had all disappeared. No one was willing to give off any sound. The silence was as though he was standing in a forest piled with snow.

Before long, two Priestesses appeared within the glass dome.

One of them was a tiny girl with black hair and eyes. She was wearing a woven vestment, and was sitting uneasily on the chair with her head lowered.

"..... Syun-rei?"

"You are to call her Priestess Syun-rei! But it's surprising for her to reveal herself before that many people. I mean, she has a really delicate personality."

The instructor was probably expressing her views in a roundabout manner by using the term 'delicate'.

She has an extreme fear towards people.

She was sitting on the chair while biting on her lips and clenching her fists..... It seemed like the black hair Priestess was trying her hardest to endure the situation.

Just then, Syun-rei's trembling shoulders—

"Hey, compose yourself. Straighten your back."

The young girl, who was wearing a ceremonial clothing with a Sennenshi badge on it, placed her hands on her shoulders.

Run — she was originally the Sennenshi who is supposed to be protecting Meimel. This time round, it seemed like she had also taken the role of protecting Syun-rei in place of Leon.

"..... M-Mmm."

As Syun-rei lifted her head with an uneasy expression on her face, Run whispered into her ears with a smile on her face. And at that very moment, a glow reappeared in the Priestess' eyes.

"Leon will definitely be shocked should he know that you are able to come here by yourself. Therefore, you must hold on for now so that you can show Leon how brave you are. Understand?"

"..... I will do my best."

As he watched the Priestess and the Sennenshi smile at each other, Sheltis could almost hear the above conversation playing in his ears.

— That's really something to be envious of.

That casual interaction was especially dazzling in Sheltis' eyes.

It's because the distance between the Priestess and Sennenshi which is depicted in that very scene is something he yearned for ever since he came to *Tenketsu Palace* <Sophia>.

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

And then.

"Good evening, everyone."

The second Priestess - the girl with pale golden hair and wearing a pure white vestment - stood on top of the stage in the dome.

Ymy Ele Soufflenictole.

The place was dead silent. Hundreds and thousands pairs of eyes had all gathered on the body of the young girl who is a Priestess.

"Urm..... Well..... It's nice seeing everyone here."

Ymy began by greeting everyone as she grabbed onto the microphone stiffly.

It was a large, unfamiliar stage. And despite being at a place that was hard for her to speak and caused her legs to be wobbly, the Priestess still did her best to maintain her smile.

Her face was stiff, and her smile showed her nervousness.

However, it was that clumsy smile of hers which conveyed something to everyone there.

The sight of her trying her hardest to keep her smile had clearly showed everyone something - the feelings of hers while she was making her speech on the stage.

"U-Urm..... firstly, I wish to apologize on behalf of all the Priestesses..... One month ago, Hyouketsu Kyoukai was breached and we came under the attack of the Yuugenshu.

As the Priestesses whose tasks are to maintain the barrier, we take full responsibility for what had happened. As a result of the breach, many are injured and countless buildings were destroyed. The whole floating continent was scarred as a result, and we Priestesses will shoulder the responsibility for all that had happened..... We are really sorry."

Ymy bowed her head deeply.

Syun-rei stood up and did the same thing as well.

"And that is even more reason why we have to do our best to ensure that the barrier will not be breached again.

For the past month, everyone of us Priestesses have been working around the clock to check on the spells of the barrier. We discussed and ensured that everything is safe and secure. – And just a while ago, Priestess Meimel has already took over the barrier from the Queen successfully.

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

I believe there are those who feel uneasy and fear that Hyouketsu Kyoukai will be breached via the same methods once more. As a Priestess who had once allowed the barrier to be breached, I may not be qualified to ask everyone of you to be at ease. Even so..... I do wish that everyone here, as well as those who are listening to my speech in the living sector - I hope that everyone can be at ease.

..... Because I feel that this is what a Priestess is supposed to do."

Fuu— after taking a deep breath, the seventeen years old Priestess took a firm grip on the microphone once more.

She did that with her frail shoulders and slender arms, as though she was not willing to let it go.

"And all that is what I am supposed to be telling everyone as a Priestess.

— Next, allow me to voice out my own views."

She took a pause and looked at the thousands of people of *Tenketsu Palace* <Sophia> who had all gathered at the place—

"..... I am a human being.

VOLUME 03

I cannot survive if I do not breathe. I will get hungry if I do not eat. I will sleep talk while dreaming..... Just like everyone else, we Priestesses are all human beings.

Therefore..... there will be times when we experience failure. This is not an excuse. I am really a muddle-headed Priestess who always fails no matter how careful I try to be.

B-But, I do really work hard! That is a definite truth!

And so..... I wish to make a request here.

I am doing my best despite my incompetence, so I hope everyone can support me. To all the staff of *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*> as well as the guards, I do hope everyone of you can offer your support to a Priestess like me."

She said that with a voice that was close to shouting.

And then, Ymy lowered her gaze and shook her head slowly.

"— No, I am not the only person who yearns for the support of others.

I hope everyone can offer your support to the

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

rest of the fellow members of the tower. Not just to me alone.

When someone is in trouble, you should offer your helping hand without waiting for him to ask for your assistance..... I can only maintain the barrier, but I believe that everyone here can do much more things that I can possibly do.

And so, please, do not ever be reckless and put yourself at risk.

..... You should not work hard all by yourselves. Rather, you should do what you can do and help others by doing so. I hope everyone can build a relation where people will help each other.

..... This tower is just so tall.

And without the support of everyone, it will collapse."

Ymy's face turned red. She fidgeted about and showed an embarrassed smile.

"And so, urm..... from now on, let's support each other..... Because we are fellow companions who are all living on the floating

continent, and residing in the same tower.

..... S-Sorry for saying all these things.....
I had thought about it for the whole night, but
I still could not come up with a beautiful way
to end my speech....."

No one spoke a word.

There were no response from the thousands of people whom she
was conveying her message to. As such, the young girl with the
microphone in hand felt a little depressed and disappointed—

"..... W-Well? So..... this still won't
do? I'm sorry—"

At that very instant.

A round of applause broke the silence and spread throughout the
training grounds. It covered over Ymy's words.

The applause went on endlessly like the torrential waterfalls.

Regardless of whether the person is Instructor Yumelda, who is
famous for her devilish training; the stern leader guards or the
director who was putting a solemn on his face - everyone was
convinced by Ymy's words. They offered their unreserved applause.

Offering it to the Priestess who is much younger than them, and
still has a slightly childish air around her.

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

"S-So everyone is willing to give me a round an applause? Thank you!"

The Priestess bowed repeatedly.

That act of hers in reply to the applause had made it confusing for one to discern whichever side was of the higher position.

The applause and the cheers continued on for a long time.

It showed their respect, reverence and praise to the Priestesses who are protecting the floating continent.

Even though Ymy was waving her hands in embarrassment to signal 't-that's enough!', the cheers showed no signs of stopping. And among all the commotion—

"....."

Sheltis was the only one to remain standing on his original place. He gently closed his eyes.

Amid the darkness, the only thing that was transmitted to him clearly were the resounding rounds of applause.

"That's incredible, Ymy. You have really..... became an outstanding Priestess."

She had said words that seeped deep into the hearts of thousands in front of her who were listening to her speech. And she did all that while protecting the floating continent as a Priestess. That is

the person his childhood friend is currently.

She has become so incredible within the two years which they were apart.

In comparison, he was just one out of the thousands of people who were here to listen to the Priestess giving her speech. As a cadet guard, the only thing he could do is to give her a round of applause.

— She's so far away from me. However, I must get to where she is.

And not only that.

"I hope everyone can offer your support to the rest of the fellow members of the tower. Not just to me alone."

"It's..... indeed like something that Ymy will say."

Sheltis put on a light smile while standing among the crowd.



That has not changed even after she has become a Priestess. He's dumbfounded by how dazzling and straightforward his childhood friend is. She is an undeniably kind girl.

— And that's the Ymy whom I want to protect.

Ever since he had made up his mind on that, Ymy has never changed till now.

"Yeah..... This tower is just so tall, so it will need the support from everyone."

He will have to obtain the highest position, the rank of a Sennenshi, with his own hands.

However, he should not be overly rash in his quest for it. Should he focus on only the peak, he will definitely miss out those beside him who has fallen and need his help.

"And so, please, do not ever be reckless and put yourself at risk."

It was as though she was deliberately conveying that line to him, who was ostracized by the rest of the cadet guards.

"..... You don't have to worry. I feel the same way too, Ymy."

There is no need for him to be frustrated, nor is there a need for him to work hard by himself.

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

All he needs to do is to help out the fellow companions in the tower as much as he can, and make his way towards the peak one step at a time. Because Ymy will be waiting for him.

"I'll try my best."

Sheltis murmured and turned his back towards Ymy.

Intermission

29 hours — Igun-I —

In a sea of trees shrouded within the mist.

The humus on the ground stuck itself to the soles of the shoes with each step taken. The skies were blocked by the rich canopy, thus sheltering the ground from the sunlight and heat.

Deep within the dark and damp sea of trees.

"..... Nothing found huh?"

Leon sighed as he stepped on the damp and sticky ground.

In his right hand was a huge sword the length of an adult. He brought it along with him just in case, but there was no need for him to use it this time round.

"With the existence of that water tank, it wouldn't be surprising if there are Yuugenshu here."

Two weeks ago, he visited this island under the orders of the Queen. This time around, he used the absolute authority of a Sennenshi to come here, and obviously so without any approval from the Government Sector. *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*> and the

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

Government Sector will be having a conference in the near future, and the issue of trespassing should be brought up during the meeting. If so, the number of times that he trespasses the island should be of no issue, since their response on the matter would not change.

"Then again, everything's the same as it was two weeks ago."

The absence of people on the island as well as the hidden facilities — everything was the same as it was when he and Sheltis visited this place two weeks ago. This included the state of destruction of the secret underground passage caused by the Yuugenshu that was named 'Slumbering Child'.

— Was that the only water tank used to breed Yuugenshu?

Leon's purpose in revisiting the floating island was to investigate that.

They discovered a water tank two weeks ago. Should there be any remaining water tanks around, he might be able to use that and find out the people behind their installation.....

"I guess there's nothing else I can do..... moreover, I have left Syun-rei by herself in the tower."

As he recalled the face of the Priestess whom he left at the tower, Leon began to walk towards the direction of his aircraft.

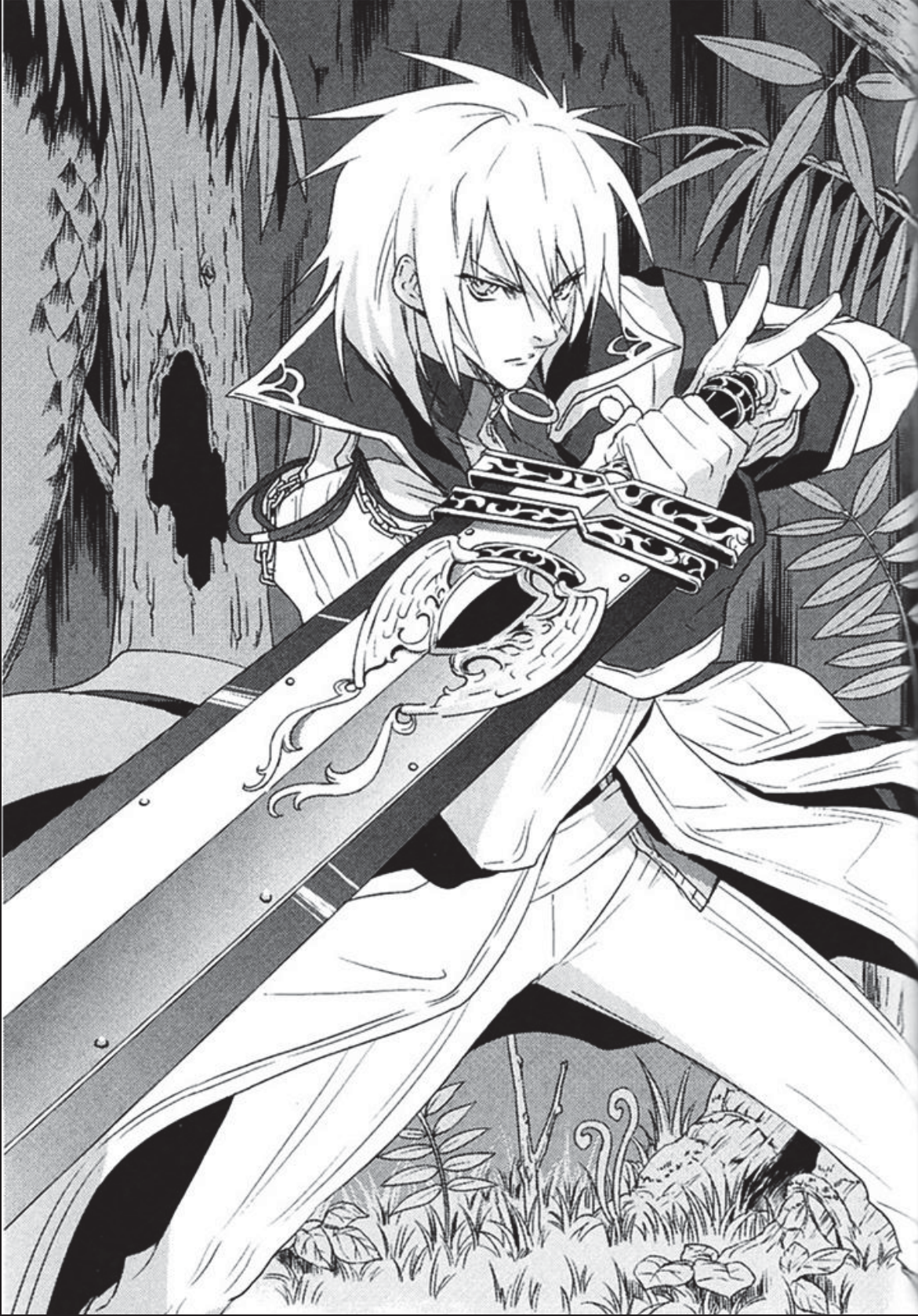
———?

Then came a incredibly feeble presence which disappeared almost immediately.

No wait, something's not right here.

"Who's that!?"

He turned around in an instant and increased his grip on the great sword with his right hand.



There were only trees before him..... nothing felt out of place.

The malaise in him had disappeared as well.

He could only hear the rustling of the leaves around him.

"....."

He widened his eyes and held his breath for ten seconds.....
twenty..... after five minutes had passed, Leon finally took a
breath. —Whatever.

Whenever something like this happened, Leon has never once
questioned himself if it was just an illusion.

It does not matter even if there is a foe ambushing him. Till the
moment when they strike and he apprehends them all.....

"You better be careful."

After announcing that to the deserted forest, Leon turned his body
away once more.

* * *

Deep in the sea of trees, after the silver haired young man had
left—

Another five minutes passed by.

"Ohh, that was scary."

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

A man with a black fedora suddenly appeared from within the trees.

"Even though I had already concealed my presence to such a feeble state..... I am speechless by how he could detect me."

He shook his head and shrugged.

"Alright. Since I am lucky enough not to be spotted by that scary Sennenshi, it's about time I began my work too..... oh?"

He quickly lifted his foot which was about to step on the ground.

There was a plant next to his foot which was bearing red fruits on it.

"Ahh, there are wild strawberries here too."

Igun-I - a tall and skinny man in a black suit with golden buttons - exclaimed in delight.

"There's another one here. Ah, there as well. I should be able to bake a wild strawberry pie with this many berries around me."

A jet black suit with a jet black fedora. Amid the blackness, he readjusted his pure white gloves properly before picking up the red fruits carefully with his long and slender fingers.

The silent sea of trees.

Only time was flowing at the depths where not even the smallest animals could be seen.

"Phew— this should be enough."

Igun-I gingerly hugged the plastic bag filled with wild strawberries before resuming his steps yet again.

"Geez, it's really tough being an errand boy. First, I have to go to the nature sector at the floating continent. Then I have to make my way to the *Floating Islands* <Archipelagos> that was so far away..... Oops."

While carrying the bag of wild strawberries with one of his hands, he used the other to press on his fedora.

— So as not to let his fedora get blown away by the breeze which came through the gaps of the trees.

"What a teasing wind that was."

Kuku

His charming lips curved upwards while his eyes remained hidden under the brim of his fedora.

"Right, I've reached my destination."

Igun-I stopped in his tracks, lifted his head and looked at the building before him.

It was a facility built with dark grey walls. The walls were almost covered with lichen. Looking at the building from above, the lichens provide a camouflaging color that blends the building into the

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

tender-green colors of the trees around it.

There were no windows and doors. One could not make out the number of stories of the building from the outside.

"..... That's just too careless of them. The reason *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*> discovered its existence is because they had left it unattended for too long. The 'Lords' do possess incredible capabilities, but their lack in the sense of crisis remains much to be desired."

A deep breath.

Next, he fished out a copper-yellow pocket watch from his chest and confirmed the positions of the needles. It's not those type of electronic clocks that can run for thousands of years, but those wind-up types which needs its batteries changed once every few years.

"Everyone laughs at me for using this antique, but I guess I like things like this the most. It is the best way to experience the sense of flowing time."

tick tock..... tick tock..... As he stared lovingly at the longest hand that ticked by every second, Igun-I began walking towards the facility filled with lichen.

"Mr Maha should be putting on quite a show right now. I guess I'll begin with the things on my side as well."

VOLUME 03

There's only twenty-nine hours left till the rendezvous of Igun-I and Maha—

Chapter 3

12 hours — Jin —

{1}

Four-thirty in the morning.

The cloudless spherical sky above his head was of the colors of the night, in which the stars were still shining brightly. The horizon at the far end was faintly glowing red from the sun's rays, indicating that it was close to dawn.

With the remnant of the cold air of the night lingering around his skin, he took a deep breath.

His lungs were filled with cold air. The comfortable chilliness was gradually causing his sleepy body to awaken. Sheltis had always love this feeling.

"..... Mmm..... phew....."

Neck, shoulders, arms. He slowly relaxed his whole body patiently before injecting strength and tensing up his muscle fibers which had loosened from his stay in the hospital.

Just then.

"—Sheltis."

He could feel a slight presence from behind him due to that person's steps on the grass.

"Has your body already recovered fully? Didn't you say you'll have to rest for a few more days before you can rejoin training?"

A bunch of eye-catching sakura-colored hair appeared beneath the cold sky.

With her hands holding onto a pair of *crossed rods* <Rosario>, the young girl in a set of spotlessly clean, pure-white ceremonial clothes was standing on the training ground filled with dew.

"Ah, morning, Monica. And also—"

"..... Morning."

Another girl was walking a few steps behind Monica.

Her body was small and frail. The ceremonial clothes which she wore were as ordinary as those of Monica's, but the mechanical helmet and visor which covered her head were especially striking.

"Eh? Kagura's here as well?"

"You sound like it is surprising for me to join the training. As one of the cadet guards, I must occasionally participate in the training as

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

well..... Moreover, I was scolded by Instructor Yumelda yesterday. She instructed me to join in more often."

Can't be helped— the young girl put on a listless expression. It seemed like she was not too willing to participate in the training.

"You hate training?"

"I don't detest an adequate amount of exercise. I just find it a chore to remove my research clothes to put on my ceremonial ones. Also, the mechanical helmet is a hindrance during exercise."

Ka. She rapped the sides of her helmet once with her fingers.

..... So she won't remove it even during training?

"Are you curious?"

"Eh? Yeah, sorry. You noticed?"

"All thanks to my experience. I had been asked by many others before."

Kagura raised two of her fingers, perhaps to signify that there were two reasons for her wearing it.

"This visor is connected directly to the computer in the research laboratory and doubles as a screen, thus enabling me to monitor the programs even when I am out of the lab..... The second reason can be explained simply by this: I am a People of Nell. You should understand, right?"

"Mmm. I've seen a few of your kind in *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*>"

Compared to 'humans', the ears of People of Nell are long and pointy, and covered with fur like that of a cat's — this is due to the fact that the People of Nell live in the cold parts of the *Floating Archipelagos* <*Lagoon*>, which resulted in that evolutionary trait. Their long ears allow them to pick up sounds in a blizzard, while the warm fur helps to fight against the cold.

"My ears will be open for all to see once I remove my helmet. I hate being stared at just because I am one of the People of Nell. I hope you will not judge me based just on my appearances alone."

Kagura placed her hands at the sides of the helmet where her ears were located inside. Her lips were pursed into a straight line.

"I won't."

"..... That's quite a straightforward answer from you."

"Mmm, it's because you're in a situation similar to mine. Take for example this coat of mine."

He insisted on wearing the old black ceremonial clothes instead of the white ones issued to him by *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*>. He had no option but to do so due to the mateki in his body. Even so, it was still difficult for him to get used to the strange stares from others. Since he can understand those feelings, he will not allow himself to judge others based on looks.

"..... You're right."

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

Kagura nodded her head as she said that bitterly.

"In that case, I guess the two of us are actually quite similar—"

Just as she was saying that.

"Ah, n-nothing of that sort! You haven't even gained the slightest bit of recognition from me! I am still treating you with a clear sense of wariness and animosity!"

"I know. Also, I'll only be practicing for a maximum of an hour before heading back to my room."

Just then— the silent Monica lifted her head. Her gaze was fixed on the twin swords placed on the bench.

"Since you've brought them here, it means you're planning to participate in the training?"

"The doctor told me it's okay to swing my swords for an hour or so."

He thought of his twin swords which were made of brilliantly shining purple crystals. He grabbed hold of the unsheathed swords to reaffirm their feel in his hands.

After much begging to his main doctor, he finally obtained permission to undergo training after many difficulties. Despite the fact that there was still a long way to go before he could join in the mock battles, he had at least obtained permission to swing his

swords by himself.

The reason for doing that was because he could no longer do nothing after seeing Ymy's performance yesterday.

"It is quite a waste to use that precious hour to train under the dark skies as the sun will be out in about two to three hours time..... Then again, you will probably be found out by Instructor Yumelda if you do that. Should that happens, the length of your training will probably not be limited to just an hour."

"That's right. That's why I must stretch myself now."

He grabbed onto one of the swords with his left hand, and lifted the other horizontally with his right—

He slashed the right sword at the air at the exact same time as he breathed. The purplish glowing sword cleaved the emptiness before him in two as though it was parting the sea.

It was as precise as an accurate scale.

He could feel the weight of the molecules of air and the specks of dusts via the edge of the blade.

— That feels pretty good.

The 'restrain' and the 'release' of his strength were good enough to allow him to accurately sever a drop of water with his blade. The actualization of that was due to his well-trained nervous system as well as his mental state. Both of them were of no difference compared to their state two weeks ago when he was not yet

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

hospitalized.

— What about moving?

His brain questioned his body.

Despite the slow responses of his muscles, which was purely due to a temporal slackness caused by a long period of rest. And once he knew his responses were dulled, he could come up with the correct countermeasures.

— No problem.

After realizing the problem, Sheltis stomped against the ground and flew towards the air. With three diagonal slashes from the right sword and two horizontal cleaves from the left, he cut out the ideal paths for the blades.

"Ha!"

He swung the twin swords hard in the air.

Horizontal sweeps, cleaves, heavy slashes and uppercuts.

After sketching out the ideal paths in his mind, he began implementing the movements one by one. Scars of the air - vacuums resulting from the slashing of the emptiness - appeared before him, and before they could disappear completely, new vacuums were etched by the other sword. His movements were swift and sharp. The audience was rendered breathless from his swordplay which flashed past their eyes.

After swinging the final move, he leaped forward and landed at the ground faraway in front of him—

Biki

"..... Ouch."

The pain and sounds of his body chapping reverberated in his mind.

..... So it's still too much for me to take?

He began to take in deep breaths as he pressed his hands against his temple so as to quell the burdens of his body.

"Are you okay?"

"Mmm..... looks like I have not recovered fully yet. I thought I had held myself back quite a lot already."

"You idiot, how's that holding yourself back!?"

The dumbfounded Monica crossed her arms and shot a meaningful look to the young girl beside her.

"What do you think?"

"..... I should have prepared video cameras in advance. His movements are abnormal. There is no way we can catch those high-speed motions with our naked eyes."

There was a rare enthusiasm to be heard from Kagura's voice.

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

"What were those moves just now? Were you practicing on a predefined set of moves?"

"It's nothing as serious as what you've said. All I had done was to come up with a random set of moves in my mind before acting them out with my body."

"So those were done impromptu..... are you a freak?"

"It's not like that."

"Eh?"

"That is the minimum standard required to be able to protect the Priestesses. Actually, I don't think that's enough. If you think I am incredible as compared to the rest of the people, that's because you are comparing me against the other cadet guards."

The regular guards are a level above the cadet guards. Going a step higher are the fifty elites named the cadres guards — and they are also the candidates for the Sennenshi.

..... It's the cadres guards who pose the real challenge.

Only five Sennenshi are chosen from within the fifty cadres guards. The competition is unimaginably intense. Even Leon was just a cadres guard two years ago as well. Also, Sheltis was once among the fifty. All the cadres guards are highly skilled, and thus the intense competition between them. Sheltis has had enough experience with this three years ago.

"I see. I am indeed looking at thing from the point-of-view of a cadet guard. That also means that your words are right where I wanted them to be....."

How so?

"Sheltis, you are indeed the person of three years ago—"

Just as Kagura was saying that with an expression of praise.

Kacha. The sound of the safety of a gun being disengaged came from far behind their back.

"Step down!"

"Eh?"

It's already too late to warn Kagura of what was going on. Having come to that conclusion within a split second, Sheltis turned his body around and swung the twin swords in midair.

The bullet was a silenced one. From the angle of the barrel that he could faintly see, he worked out the path of the bullet.

—*Kin!*

The bullet was deflected away along with the sound of clashing metal.

"..... W-What are you two doing!?"

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

Kagura was the first to shout.

One of them was a dual gunner wearing a large ceremonial coat, while the other was a young girl dressed in a skirt. The badges of the regular guards were clearly visible on their left arms.

Jin and I'sa. The two people whom he had seen just yesterday were walking towards them leisurely.

"You're really something to be able to respond just from the sound of the safety disengagement."

"..... What do you mean by 'you're really something'? Attacking from the back isn't something that should be coming from a regular guard."

Kagura berated them furiously as she suppressed her shock. Her sight was focused on the jet-black pistol in the hands of the dual gunner — the barrel was still emitting thin trails of white smoke.

"Please stop with these horrible jokes of yours. I'll be reporting to the instructor for what you have done earlier—"

"Hold on, Kagura. It's not like that. They were not aiming for us."

"..... Huh? What are you talking about, Sheltis?"

"What I mean is, we were not their target."

Using the blade that he had used earlier to parry the bullet, Sheltis pointed towards the direction of the ground. It was a black trail

that streaked past the turf. Judging from its direction, it would have only grazed past Sheltis, Kagura and Monica and made its way towards the trunk of the tree.

"I had deflected the bullet out of reflex. The bullet would not have hit us anyway."

"It's great that you understand. It would be troublesome for us if you complain to Instructor Yumelda or the Boss without knowing the truth."

While combing her golden twintails, I'sa pointed her fingers in their direction,

"Mmm, you've passed. I shall permit you to join us. Follow me."

It's a pass? Join them?

Sheltis looked towards Monica and Kagura in confusion, but he was met with their gazes as well. All of them must be thinking of the same things right now.

"Sorry, but I do not get what you mean."

"I have no idea what you are talking about."

"There is a severe defect in your conversational capabilities. I can recommend you a really good doctor. You can try again once he has you fixed."

"What's with the attitudes of you all!? To think that I have specially made my way here to find you..... Umhhh?"

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

"Calm down, I'sa. You're not making any sense."

After covering the mouth of the girl, the dual gunner, Jin, placed his dual pistols back into the holsters at his waist.

"Sorry for frightening you guys with that sudden snipe of mine. That was me playing along with I'sa's silly plan of 'testing your capabilities by attacking you in secret', which had resulted in what happened earlier. However, the results were within our expectations."

"What's your motive?"

Monica asked without blinking an eye.

"It's just like what I'sa had said. We are here to invite the twin sword wielder to join a group of four regular guards, which includes me and I'sa, to take on a mission."

..... Me?

Both Jin and I'sa were looking at Sheltis,

"We've lost contact with a group of cadet guards who were patrolling the nature sector about twenty-nine hours ago. We have no idea if it was a malfunction of the communication devices, or if they had encountered any sort of mishap..... the headquarters deemed it as a mishap, and had thus dispatched a rescue team. That was something that happened yesterday morning, twenty-two hours ago."

"Mmm, I heard that from Instructor Yumelda already."

The members of the team consisted of a group of cadet guards selected under a set of strict criteria. Sheltis would have been recommended as well if not for his injuries.

"That rescue team suddenly stopped responding to our calls six hours ago."

Jin's tone became stern. As for I'sa who was standing by his side, her eyes showed nervousness which was never before seen from her.

"Six hours ago, the rescue team sent a SOS signal to us. Just as *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*> was about to ascertain the situation, there was a deafening roar from the other side of the speakers — and that was all we've got."

"..... Is it the Yuugenshu?"

Monica raised her head questioningly.

Despite not quite sounding like a roar, the mateki of the Yuugenshu do carry with them a strange sound. The rescue team may very well have encountered a strong Yuugenshu.

"No. The analysis team is currently analyzing the sound, but it seemed to be different from the mateki of the Yuugenshu. To add on, it does not sound like the cry of a harmful beast."

I'sa replied as she combed her cascading hair with her fingers.

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

"In other words, the cause of their mishap is unknown. The rescue headquarters has deemed the situation to be serious, and has thus decided to dispatch an official team which comprises of regular guards and apprentice-Priestesses for the rescue mission. I'sa and I are summoned to the team."

"..... I now understand what is going on, but why are you inviting me into an official team?"

For an official team which comprises of regular guards and above, there are cases where the cadet guards will be allowed to join the team to train and study under them. However, it is rare for that to happen when it comes to an important mission like this.

"This is a good opportunity for you to learn."

Jin continued calmly without any change in his expression.

"*Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>* is in need of outstanding guards. Back during the two-man team battle..... I'sa and I could not understand why we had to fight against the cadet guards. However, we've finally understood the reason behind Instructor Yumelda's request. With your skills, you should be promoted to a regular guard in no time."

"If that's the case, then it will be good for you to amass some experience, isn't it so?"

On one side was the calm and collected Jin, and on the other was I'sa with her haughty smile. Despite the vast differences in their

attitudes, Sheltis could not detect any malice coming from them.

"Did someone recommend me? People like Instructor Yumelda, for example."

"You must think it's strange, but the answer is no. Neither the instructors nor the Sennenshi have interfered in this. The team originally consisted of only the two of us, but I'sa mentioned you suddenly."

"J-Jin! You don't have to tell him that!"

The young girl hastily nudged the sides of the dual gunner with her elbow.

"It's you?"

"..... Uhh, fine. Since Jin has revealed it already, I might as well as be honest about it."

I'sa stretched out her finger and pointed towards Sheltis with a lofty smile on her face.

"Listen up. I really hate losing. Ever since our horrible defeat in that team battle, I have been dying to have a rematch with you. The reason for inviting you to the rescue team is so that you can see for yourself just how much I've improved — and you have to thank me for that. There's not much chance for a cadet guard to be part of a team that consists of regular guards."

"But, like I had said earlier, I am still recuperating."

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

"It sure doesn't look like it from the way you were swinging your swords earlier on..... Putting the jokes aside, the mission is practically done with with me and Jin in the team. All you need to do is to be in charge of the records and communications. If that's the case, then there's no need for you to be personally involved in it."

..... So she has planned out everything already.

Her proposal made Sheltis really happy. Having been ostracized by the other cadet guards and put in a situation where he could not join any squad, he had never expected the regular guards to invite him into their team.

"..... Thanks."

"It's decided then. Go get yourself prepared, we'll be setting off in an hour."

"But forgive me for rejecting your offer this time."

"Eh?"

I'sa blinked her jade-colored eyes.

"The doctor had specially instructed me not to take part in any training before my recovery..... Moreover, I've something urgent to attend to, which may take up a lot of my time."

And so, I'm sorry — Sheltis shrugged his shoulders slightly in apology.

"Looks like it is really not fated to be. Let's go, I'sa."

"It can't be helped. Whatever, we'll definitely defeat you in the next team battle so that you'll be convinced of our strength. Make sure your body is completely healed before that happens."

After flashing a meaningful wink at Sheltis, I'sa flipped her skirt as she made a half-turn and chased up to Jin in a light jog.

After watching their backs disappear from their sights—

"When you were talking about the urgent matter, were you referring to me analyzing the Yuugenshu?"

Kagura broke the silence with her question.

"That's one of the reasons. It's also because Monica had just invited me into her squad. Under these situations, it will be too selfish of me to join the team of others and leave Kagura to analyze the Yuugenshu by yourself."

"Of course. I will definitely not help someone as selfish as that."

Kagura turned her body away after saying that.

"Hmm? Where are you heading to, Kagura?"

"The research laboratory. Since the matter on the Yuugenshu is really urgent..... I'll not make you wait longer for it. Ahh, it's not like my opinion of you has improved due to what had just happened. It's simply me wanting to beat Eyriey, that's all. Please

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

do not get the wrong idea."

Kagura left without looking back.

"..... So I still cannot win her trust after all?"

"At the very least, it is much better than when she first met you. But that's quite the problem. I have no idea if she will be joining the squad with the way things are going."

Monica was putting on a complicated expression as she crossed her arm. Sheltis has no idea if that was her feeling troubled or at ease.

"We'll have to think of a way for you to gain her trust.."

"..... You're right."

As he could not bring himself to look straight into Monica's face, Sheltis turned his head away lightly instead.

Telling her his past in order to obtain Kagura's trust..... is something that can never be done. He'll spark a huge uproar should the existence of a young man who possess mateki in his body due to falling into the *Garden of Corrupted Song* <Eden> come into light.

But on the other hand, they will not be able to get the minimum number of members required for the squad should he fail to obtain Kagura's trust. If that's the case, he will not gain access to the missions required to be promoted to a regular guard — he was at a loss of what to do.

"..... What should I do?"

Without any concrete ideas in his mind, the only thing Sheltis could do was to raise his head and stare at the sky blankly.

* * *

Ku..... u.....

Rays of the sun shone through the stained glass. The rays were dyed with the colors of the glass, resulting in the pure white corridor being decorated by the multicolored lights.

The well-lit corridor was spacious and silent.

The two hundred and ninetieth story of *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*>.

Out of the two hundred and ninety one stories of the sky-scraping tower, it is the level which is located directly below the floor of <<Paradise>>. It is only accessible via an elevator that serves certain special floors, including those where the Priestesses live in.

"..... It's so quiet."

The silence was absolute and overbearing. The corridor was dead quiet, and the air was clear and transparent.

It was as if sound dreaded that solemn space.

"..... It's really quiet."

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

Ymy walked along the lengthy corridor as she listened to her murmurs echo in the passageway.

There is only a single named room on this vast floor.

Queen Salah's <<Atrium of Dreams>>.

It's the room that belongs to the Queen, the holder of the absolute position within *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*> — a private room where the Queen can rest herself sufficiently during the three day rest period after praying for Hyouketsu Kyoukai for nearly a month.

The place is rarely visited even by the Priestesses. Meimel claimed that she will visit the place occasionally due to 'private matters', but this was only the second time that Ymy was here.

..... My heart is beating so fast.

There may be some who may laugh at her if she as a Priestess was nervous about coming to this place. However, just like how the residents of the living sector see the Priestesses as the embodiments of holiness, the Priestesses revere the Queen from the bottom of their hearts. It is no easy task to pray for the barrier continuously for a month — and it is because that they know for themselves just how difficult and painful that was, that the Queen became the person whom the Priestesses yearn to emulate.

At the end of the corridor.

What stood before her was a giant metallic door that made her raise her head subconsciously to view it. Aside from being coated

in a bright silver color like that of mercury, the door was decorated in the colors gold and sky-blue all over.

"Sorry for interrupting."

Ymy made a deep bow in front of the door and placed her hand on the lock.

"Authenticating..... connection to Shinryoku
Authority Bureau normal..... checking.....
match found of the wave pattern of
shinryoku..... verifying.....

Verified to be fifth Priestess - Ymy
Ele Soufflenictole."

The only key that can open that door is the wave pattern of shinryoku. The door will not react to anyone other than the five Priestesses and their Sennenshi, as well as the few attendants.

Gi..... The door opened from both sides along with a solemn sound.

On the other side of the door was a dazzling blue sky.

Three of the four sides of the room were surrounded by glass walls, and beyond those walls is the sky two thousand meters off the ground.

Even though the room was located in the center of the tower, Ymy could somehow see the skies through the walls. However, her

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

inquiry was soon drowned by the majestic scene of the sky before her.

The room was paved with a pure white carpet.

The daily necessities are kept on a small table in a corner and in a wardrobe. That was nothing surprising, considering the fact that the room will only be used for three days every month. However, the room was a bit too empty in contrast with the solemn and magnificent image of the Queen.

There was only a large canopy bed in the middle of the room.

The canopy with drapes flowing down from above was made out of pale red lace. Next to it was a layer of translucent cloth with frills on the sides.

There was a silhouette of a person behind the sheer cloth.

"Good afternoon, Ymy. Sorry for making you wait."

"N-Not at all! I am the one who should be sorry..... for interrupting your rest!"

Ymy replied respectfully when she heard the voice of the Queen.

..... What to do what to do!?

She had cleanly forgotten the words that she had prepared earlier. All she could do was to squeeze out those awkward words from her mouth.

"There is no need for you to be prudish."

kuku

The silhouette of the Queen trembled slightly behind the lace canopy.

"Please take a seat. The chair is over there. Feel free to help yourself to the water in the teapot should you be thirsty."

"A-Alright. Thank you."

Ymy finally settled down after hearing the surprisingly easy-going speech from the Queen..... though it may be just the Queen acting in consideration of her. Still, it is hard for her to get used to pompous speech.

Speaking of which.

— Queen Salah's voice sounds surprisingly young?

Perhaps it is because Ymy was used to hearing her stately voice in official situations. Upon conversing with the Queen privately in a relaxed manner, the Queen sounds much younger than usual. No, actually, it is more accurate to say that she sounds more innocent. Probably around the age of twenty..... no, perhaps even younger—
—?

"Oh. Ymy."

"Yes."

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

"Your speech was excellent. The event was really lively."

"..... Eh!?"

She exhaled the breath that she had held in her lungs due to her nervousness.

"W-Wha..... D-Did you see everything, Queen Salah!?"

"Mhmm. From this very room."

..... T-That's so embarrassing.

My cheeks are so hot, and my ears must be red as well.

"T-That..... was just me being too full of myself."

"Not at all. I thought it was a really important inspiration from you — but let's not talk about that for now." Behind the sheer cloth, the silhouette of the Queen was getting up slowly

"You have something that you want to discuss with me, don't you?"

"Y-Yes!"

Ymy was snapped back to reality in an instant. It was just as if the Queen had seen through her thoughts. She straightened her back on reflex.

"I am the only other person here, so feel free to speak your mind."

"..... Alright."

Ymy tried to calm herself down by grabbing onto the vestment in front of her chest. The questions that she wanted to ask and the things that she wanted to know. It would be a month before she can see the Queen again should she miss the chance to do so now. She had to clear her queries right away.

"If you may, please tell me everything about mateki."

"That's surprising. To think that you, a Priestess, would like to know more about the mateki. What do you wish to know about it?"

She could feel the gaze of the Queen through the translucent canopy.

"..... If someone is to possess mateki within his body, would there be anyway to purify it?"

"The baptism shinryoku arts that can purify mateki — is it not the art that you excel at the most?"

"Yes. But....."

She stared at her fingers that were placed on her chest.

White fingers with sakura-colored nails. A month ago, those fingers were dyed with her own blood.

"Strange..... Why..... can't both of us..... do something as

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

simple..... as holding hands....."

The boy that I was yearning for had finally returned. I wanted to hug him out of joy — however, despite reuniting after being apart for two years, the two of us could not even touch each other.

Elbert Resonance. The intense pain brought about by the sparks that injured both of us and what was close to driving me crazy — it is the result of the repulsion of my shinryoku and his mateki.

Two weeks ago, the *machine crystal* <Ilis> said this.

"..... There's only one explanation for that."

"Ymy, you are in possession of the strongest shinryoku out of the five Priestesses. The reason why you're the only person to repel Sheltis..... is because your shinryoku is too powerful."

The night before Sheltis headed off to the *Floating Archipelagos* <Lagoon>. I had finally realized the fact that Elbert Resonance will only occur between me and him.

..... That.....

..... Is just too cruel.

"It is mateki that I cannot purify given my current self."

The overly powerful mateki and shinryoku. Even my baptism spells were rejected by the repulsion of the two forces. After thinking over it for a long time, I realized that the Queen may be my only hope.

"If that's the case, then why don't you seek the help of the other Priestesses?"

"..... I've thought about that before as well."

I am the only one who is repulsed by Sheltis' mateki.

If Syun-rei is willing to spend the time to cast the baptism spells patiently, she may be able to do just that. However.....

"I hope to do it myself."

That's right, I want to be the one to remove the mateki in him.

— Did Sheltis hear the speech that I gave yesterday?

The reason he wants to become a Sennenshi is because of me.

If so, then how should I go about to answer his feelings?

I hate waiting while doing nothing. I wish I can repay Sheltis' feelings myself.

And that is precisely why I must live up to my responsibilities..... I hope I can become a Priestess who Sheltis can be really proud of,

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

and not just in name alone.

— To become a real Priestess of Baptism.

"I think there must be a way. Queen Salah may have the answer to it."

"How very intriguing. Let's set aside the possibility of me knowing the answer to your question for now. It seems like you are dead certain that a method to eradicate the mateki exists."

"— My confidence is based on *Seventh Heaven Rhythm* <Sophia Code>."

She stared straight into the gaze of the Queen through the sheer cloths.

"I..... noticed it at the Grand Holy Hall. I have also personally experienced how shinryoku and mateki will repulse each other. However—

Despite being mateki as well, the *Seventh True Rhythm* <Eden Code> was not repulsed by the doors of the Grand Holy Hall."

She still could not forget that very moment.

Back when *Tenketsu Palace* <Sophia> was under the assault of Yuugenshu, Syun-rei and herself were surrounded by them. The scene in which Sheltis' voice had opened the doors of the Grand Holy Hall, even though it was originally rejecting mateki.

"Mateki and shinryoku..... will repulse one another. However, I do not think that is all there is to it. It seems like there exist secrets of the mateki and shinryoku which even the Priestesses do not know."

"If that's the case, then the *Seventh Heaven Rhythm* <*Sophia Code*> may possess certain special properties as well. Is that what you are thinking?"

"..... Yes."

Silence.

After what felt like an eternity, the Queen behind the drapes spoke once more,

"Here's my conclusion: the possibility is almost zero. The reason is that the current *Seventh Heaven Rhythm* <*Sophia Code*> is something that is 'rearranged' to become the exclusive shinryoku melody for Queen Salah, who is me."

"Rearranged?"

"There is no need for you to think too hard into it. It will be difficult for me to explain everything to you clearly even if I have the whole night to do so. Moreover, there exists other possibilities within you."

Other possibilities?

It was something that is hard for her to comprehend. There should be no other methods to remove the mateki in Sheltis' body other than *Seventh Heaven Rhythm* <*Sophia Code*>.

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

"Is that true!? Then what—"

"Ymy, I know you are very anxious about it, but please do not forget your standing as a Priestess. As the fifth Priestess — as the Priestess of Baptism, you will have to be more adept at the baptism arts than anyone else..... do you understand what I am trying to say?"

"..... Ah."

Her emotions calmed down gradually.

..... As the Priestess of Baptism, you will have to discover the method yourself.

That was what the Queen was implying.

"..... I am very sorry."

"Fufu, it's nothing. It has been a year since you have became a Priestess. Meimel has been praising how hardworking you are. She is not one who praises others easily, you know?"

Meimel?

If she remembers right, Meimel frequents this floor.....

"Speaking of which. I have a question for you, Ymy."

"S-Sure. May I know what it is?"

"Nothing of great importance— ah, I've said this earlier. Feel free to drink from the teapot. This room is a little dry."

"I will not hold myself back then."

..... Thank goodness. Ymy's throat and lips were parched from her nervousness.

Ymy took the swan-shaped glass teapot and poured the water into a glass on the table. She tipped the glass to her mouth as she enjoyed the cool touch of the glass.

"Ymy, what is your relationship with Sheltis Magna Yehle?"

"~~~~~!?"

She spat out the water in her mouth.

"Ku..... Ka..... Kha..... W-What do you mean by that?"

"He's the one who you want to treat, isn't that so? You wish to remove the mateki in his body. Are you harboring that thought as a Priestess? Or as a girl?"

"So..... you know about him?"

"It's another thing if we are talking about people who are infected by mateki. However, there is only one person on the floating continent who possesses mateki within him."

Indeed. The Queen knows everything. In another words, she had

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

no option but to be clear about her stand.

"Both applies to me..... I think."

"Both as a Priestess and as a girl?"

Ymy nodded her head in silence. The Queen should be able to see that clearly from behind the drapes.

..... I may be scolded by her.

..... However, I will never give up these feelings of mine, regardless of the situation.

As someone who cannot abandon my own personal feelings, I may be seen as an incompetent Priestess.

"Your feelings are nothing commendable, but it's not like it is something bad either."

"Eh? Ah....."

"You thought you'd be scolded by me? Your thoughts are written clearly on your face."

On the other side of the translucent drapes, the Queen was smiling gently as she covered her mouth with her hand.

"What I cannot accept is someone who neglects the responsibilities of a Priestess due to the excessive concerns she has for someone. That is all. One does not have to abandon her own feelings just

because she is a Priestess. The two are not the same."

"H-Ha..... Right."

The Queen was rather abstract with her words. She could not discern from the Queen's tone if she was lecturing, admonishing or praising her.

"Then again, it would be too cruel of me to leave you clueless. I shall grant you a key to unlock the possibility within you."

— The possibility in me?

— A key?

"Ymy, do you know about Syun-rei's art of <<Pupils>>?"

"Ah..... I do. It is an art to see the 'forms' of a person's shinryoku."

"Mhmm. Just as you've already knew, each and every Priestess has different arts in which they excel in. Yours is the baptism-type which can purify mateki, while Meimel's the barrier-type which allows her to deploy her shinryoku over a large area. And as for territorial-type which includes far-sight and telepathy — in another words, extra-sensory systems, Syun-rei is the most capable out of you all."

The arts in which they excel in.

There are some Priestesses who can use some unique spells within their excelled systems.

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

Syun-rei, the youngest Priestess of them all, is one of them.

"Syun-rei's <<Pupils>> can see the 'forms' of our shinryoku in each and every one of us. The 'form' represents our nature. I believe you had gotten her to take a look at yours as well, did you not?"

"..... Meimel told me about it on the day I became a Priestess, so I had Syun-rei to take a look at it."

Shinryoku are waves of miracles granted to humans at birth, and closely related to their spirits.

Its shape will represent the image of a person — that was what Meimel had said.

"In any case— whenever she looks at the 'form', it is equivalent to her peeking at the heart of the person. Syun-rei uses that ability to determine who she can trusts.

..... Under the restraints and shackles of her anthropophobia, her gifted ability provides her with a way of survival.

And then she finally found it. Out of more than a thousand guards, she found the 'form' of shinryoku that can accept her warmly, and was as brilliant as the sun — the holder of the <<Solar Stone>>.

And that person is Leon.

That is the reason why Syun-rei chose Leon to be her Sennenshi."

"So, did Meimel reveal her 'form' to you as well?"

"Yes..... I remember it was the <<Flawless Crystal>>."

No one knows for sure the criteria for her judgement.

However, Syun-rei is not a girl who lies. That must be what Meimel's shinryoku looks like her eyes.

"So returning back to the topic, do you still remember your 'form'?"

"O-Of course I do! Meimel told me I must never forget it. And so, in my own spells....."

ele So Phi-a-s Arma-Riris

<Please accept all wishes that I can grant.....>

In the opening sequence when she activates her shinryoku — the word '*Arma-Riris* <*Amaryllis*>' was entrusted within them.

[TLNote: Amaryllis is a species of flowers, wiki link [here](#)]

That is my image.

"It's a flower bud, isn't it?"

"Yes."

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

On the day when she got Syun-rei to look at her own 'form', Syun-rei was carrying with her a herbarium.

"..... Ymy's 'form' is a flower bud."

"..... It looks very much like the bud of this flower."

Amaryllis — a tiny flower with crimson petals.

Much brighter than roses, and much purer than flames. That is how authentic its redness is.

"Ah..... B-But Queen Salah, what does that have to do with me?"

"You will know in the future — when your spirit grows and your image blossoms."

The Queen sounded just like an encouraging mother.

"You will take a few detours along the way, but there is only one thing which I can say — Ymy, make the possibility which belong to you bloom. That is the only way for you to fulfill your wish."

"I will put it to heart."

..... So a method does exist?

It all sounds very abstract — however, it did not seem like Queen Salah was lying just to give her hope. If so, there must be other

ways of purifying the mateki in Sheltis.

That knowledge itself was a huge gain in this visit. As long as she knew there is hope..... she will be able to hang on no matter how difficult the path would be in the future.

"Thank you very much. I feel much better now."

"It is great to be of help to you. I am looking forward to your performances in the future."

"Yes. I shall be taking my leave."

Ymy gave a deep bow before leaving the <<Atrium of Dreams>>.

After the Priestess with pale golden hair had left the room.

"Phew....."

Queen Salah — the lady who was named as such heaved a loud sigh.

It was a voice which makes one think of the tender green leaves. Her voice was much more childish compared to the one used in official situations or when she was talking to Ymy earlier — it was the voice of a young girl.

"It's tough. It was really tough picking the right time to tell her."

She sighed as she stretched her arms to lift the sheer drapes of the canopy. Her eyes narrowed in response to the blinding rays of the sun. She then placed the drapes down again.

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

"It's still so bright outside..... I was thinking of going to the large bath, but I will probably garner lots of unwanted attention should I go at a time like this. Looks like I have no choice but to wait until the sky is dark."

In any case, she could hardly move her body due to the fatigue from praying for Hyouketsu Kyoukai for a month. She would have to rest a while longer.

"I'll rest until the night."

Salah laid herself back on the bed as she murmured that.

{2}

Eleventh story of *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*>, dormitory of the cadet guards.

"Next, question number thirty-two. Please answer this question by putting yourself in the shoes of a Yuugenshu. You are now a Yuugenshu that has just broken past the barrier and is now attacking the floating continent. What will your very first targets be: humans or buildings?"

"..... Probably not humans."

"Question number thirty-three. Your reason for that?"

"That's how most of the Yuugenshu I have seen acted."

"Which means to say you are speculating based on similar happenings? Well then, question number thirty-four—"

"W-Wait! Let me rest for a while. Also, there are questions that I want to ask you as well!"

While sitting on a chair, Sheltis raised his hands up to interrupt the young girl who was keying in data at high speed.

"If you wish to ask me things pertaining to my questions, then I am sorry to say that I cannot answer. Feel free to ask me anything else."

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

The young girl in front of him — Kagura, remained staring at the screen. She continued to type on the keyboards of the computers with her nimble fingers while conversing with him.

"Urm..... how much longer till it is over?"

"Just like I had said earlier on, I will have to amass a certain amount of data before I can use them as references to derive the patterns of the movements of Yuugenshu."

"I have already been answering your questions for one whole hour."

"It's because you are always hesitating with your answers. Monica only took half of the amount of time you used. Isn't that right, Monica?"

Kagura turned towards the direction of the girl with sakura-colored hair, who nodded her head in agreement.

"Yeah. Though my questions were different from yours. I answered them all with my gut feelings."

"That's right. You have yet to hypnotize yourself as a Yuugenshu, Sheltis. You have to integrate yourself into the role better."

"..... I'll try my best."

He took a deep breath and braced himself.

It all began when he was done with his dinner on the thirty-sixth

story of the tower and had returned back to his room.

Kagura and Monica barged into his room at just the right time, and that was how the lengthy conversation started. Since it was something related to his request to Kagura, Sheltis was more than willing to help. However, it was a little draining to answer questions for an hour straight.

"Rest time's over. Question number thirty-four. Please answer this question by putting yourself in the shoes of a Yuugenshu. To your left is a fallen beauty, and to your right is a stout swordsman with a sword in his hand. Who will you attack?"

"..... That's a difficult one."

In the end—

It was two hours later when Kagura finally stopped her hands from keying in any more data.

"That should be roughly it. It's been hard on you."

"It's over?"

"Yes. I am now doing the fine-tuning, so I no longer require any more assistance from the two of you. Thank you for your help too, Monica."

Kagura informed them simply before directing her attention back to the screen. Even though her eyes were hidden beneath the visors, it felt like she did not even blink her eyes once.

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

"That was really long."

"It's not my fault."

Sheltis sighed in response to Monica's pitying smile and sat on the bed.

Different from Kagura's laboratory which is of a decent size, his room was built specifically for the cadet guards' use. Not only was the place small, there were also not enough chairs for the three of them.

"Sorry for looking around..... but this room feels very neutral in terms of gender," said Monica as she scanned the room enthusiastically.

"Well, my room....."

"Actually, Monica's room is much emptier. Since she owns very little cosmetics or casual clothes, she does not need much space to store them."

"—U..... Uh!?"

Monica was rendered speechless momentarily from the words of the sharp-eared Kagura.

"K-Kagura! How about you focus on your analysis instead of wasting your time talking about other people's room? Didn't you boast that you will have the results ready by today?"

"I am done with it."

Thousands of lines of characters gushed on the screen like waves. When the characters vanished, what was left on the screen were the words 'Analysis Results'.

"How's it?"

"— Simply put, it's 'an unexpected result that is within expectations'. I'll print it out."

The printer on the desk was activated immediately as Kagura touched the screen with her finger. Two sets of two-page data were printed within seconds.

"Here. Please take a look at it, Sheltis and Monica."

"Urm..... the first page is filled with mathematical formulas. Are those the calculation results?"

The whole paper was filled to the brim with formulas. It was not just filled with equal and unequal signs, but also with other mathematical symbols which Sheltis has never seen before.

"That's right. To explain it in laymen's terms, this is what I meant by 'an unexpected result that is within expectations'. One can understand how illogical the actions of Yuugenshu are after taking a look at this data. They have strayed far from human logic."

After printing a copy of the data for herself, Kagura pointed at the top of the sheet and continued,

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

"For example, what would the Yuugenshu attack first — humans or buildings? If it is humans, then would the priority be on the adults or the children? The males or the females? Also, who would have a higher chance of being attacked — those who wear red or those who wear yellow? As for the buildings, would the hotels be prioritized, or would it be the office buildings? I have asked both Sheltis and Monica questions like these earlier, and the conclusion that I've obtained is that they are 'totally undependable'."

"The answers from both of us?"

"Yes. I can see a certain trend from both answers. For example, Monica will give priority to the stronger opponents, while Sheltis will tend to choose foes that are easier to defeat. However, the Yuugenshu do not have any inclinations of that sort. It's like they are picking their targets by chance."

"Since they do not choose their targets, it means that they are attacking at random?"

"That's the most problematic part. We cannot assume that."

Beneath her visor, Kagura continued with a serious tone,

"How should I put it..... I feel that certain rules do exist among the Yuugenshu, although they are something unknown to us and cannot be converted to a mathematical model for now. Then again, that view has long been discussed to death in past researches."

"Meaning to say, there is nothing we can do until we discover their rules?"

"Not quite."

Kagura's mysterious smile deepened.

It was as if she was waiting for him to say that all this time.

"In any case, I'll explain it later. Do not think about it for now. Let us go straight to the second page."

Both of them flipped to the second piece of paper as she urged.

Different from the earlier form of presentation, the next page was a diagram filled with lots of colorful symbols. There were plenty of red ▲ markings scattered all over the map of the floating continent. There were also blue lines connecting various parts of the floating continent together.

..... What an intriguing diagram.

The red ▲ and the blue lines. It was hard to locate areas where the red and blue intersect — perhaps it was because of the difference in the data used and represented.

"You should have already realized that this is the map of the floating continent. The red ▲ symbols represents areas where the Yuugenshu has appeared twice or more. And then..... based on those results, the blue lines show the possible areas where the Yuugenshu can show up in the future."

"Hold on, Kagura. I have a question. Since those red ▲ represents areas of high frequency, wouldn't it be more logical to view those

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

areas as the possible places where the Yuugenshu will appear next?"

"Past data means nothing when we are dealing with the Yuugenshu."

Kagura's voice was filled with an absolute confidence in reply to Monica's question.

"The areas with two or more occurrences are probably nothing more than just pure coincidences. What I did was to go against the thought patterns of humans — first, I assumed that the choices made by Sheltis, Monica and I are good enough to represent those made by a majority of humans. I then keyed in totally opposite results into the database for analysis."

"..... And was it successful?"

"How could that be?"

Kagura was quick to dismiss her actions.

"Ultimately, the computer is designed to analyze, following rules set by human beings. God knows the number of times messages like 'formulation error' and 'error: calculations exceeded predefined settings' have occurred — that's right, everything was within my expectations. It would be problematic if they weren't."

Her voice was filled with an enthusiasm and emotions previously unseen from her.

And a self-confidence which they never knew of.

"The trails of the blue lines represent the areas where the errors occurred. After hundreds and thousands of errors, a boundary is then formed by connecting all the unknown areas together."

Beyond the boundaries of human logic.

Beyond the settings of the man-made computers.

Forcing the occurrences of the illogical results and stringing them together to form an unknown boundary line. So that was what Kagura had came up with — was that her interpretation of the rules of the *Garden of Corrupted Song* <Eden> in which the Yuugenshu resides in?

"Along the blue line are a few areas marked by the symbol ●. They are places where it took the most effort to filter out — simply put, they are places with the highest 'illogical' ratio."

"..... There are five in total."

Two in the nature sector, and three in the *ecosystem-conservation sector* <biotope>.

Those are the possible places where the Yuugenshu may appear at.

"And that concludes my explanation. Despite the short amount of time, I did this with all of my sincerity. I will answer any queries which you may have."

"I know nothing about the technical aspects of the report."

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

Sheltis looked straight at Kagura as he grabbed onto the papers tightly.

"But thank you. I'll make sure the data is put to good use."

"Alright. But like I had said earlier, I will only help you once. I did it because of Eyriey and Monica. Please do not assume I will be providing you with any more assistance."

"..... You sure are strict."

"I can reconsider things if you are willing to answer 'that question'..... Putting that aside, what are you planning to do, Monica? Will you be accompanying Sheltis in his quest to verify my analysis results? I'll remind you now that this is not within the domains of missions. Not only will you not receive any reward points, there is also a high possibility that you will be doing it all in vain."

Kagura's doubts were harsh but reasonable.

It was Sheltis who had requested for the analysis, so Monica has no obligation to participate in the verification of the results. Rather than to waste her time on things like this, it would be much better for her to clear some missions and earn reward points.

..... Monica should be aiming to get herself promoted to the ranks of regular guard as quickly as possible.

He glanced at her quietly — Sheltis then held his breath due to his

surprise from what he saw.

..... Monica was actually smiling?

"I'll follow Sheltis wherever he goes."

The girl nodded, and her long sakura-colored hair swayed along with her action.

A barely noticeable smile appeared on the edge of her lips.

"To the cadet guards, this may be something unrelated to the missions. However, I invited Sheltis into the squad because I want to be promoted to the regular guards together with him. I am willing to do it."

"..... Do you really believe in Sheltis?"

"Well, it is just like how Kagura believes in me."

"....."

The silence from Kagura was longer than any of her previous ones.

"..... I am very interested about my analysis results as well."

She crossed her arms in slight frustration.

"It is not like me to just provide you two with the data and leave the rest of the work in your hands. Sheltis, call me before heading out on the investigation. I will be coming along as well."

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

"Are you okay with that?"

"I would not come along if *my friend* <Monica> was not going. Moreover, I was planning to personally verify my research as well. And should the Yuugenshu appear in the predicted areas..... though I am not dying to see them, it would prove that my theory is right."

Kagura turned around.

"Well then, I'll be going off now. It's already late into the night..... oops....."

Her body suddenly leaned towards her side.

"Kagura?"

"I-It's alright, Monica. I'm just..... very tired from staying awake and focusing for thirty-three consecutive hours."

She stood up wobbly and pressed her hand against the table at her side to regulate her breathing.

"Geez, you've not changed a bit."

"Mmm. I'll take a snooze after a hot water bath."

Under the supervision of Monica who was putting on a wry smile, Kagura walked slowly through the corridor. Sheltis could not help but to knit his eyebrows as he looked the sight of her frail back.

"..... Somehow, I feel really apologetic when I see her like this."

Thirty-three hours. The time period mentioned by Kagura was the time difference from when he first met her until their separation not too long ago. In other words, Kagura was focused on the job of analysis without having taken a rest ever since she had accepted his request.

..... Though she seemed so unwilling to at the beginning.

"I am already used to it. That is just how she is. Speaking of which, what should we do with this?"

Monica shut the door quietly. Her hands was still holding onto the two pieces of paper given to her by Kagura.

"There is no need to hurry. But since we've already obtained the data, should we visit one of the spots?"

"Let's begin from the place closest to us."

The blue trail that was sketched on the map of the floating continent. The areas on it that were not marked by ▲ are the places predicted by Kagura to be where the Yuugenshu would be appearing next.

Two of those places are located in the nature sector, while three are in *ecosystem-conservation sector* <biotope>. And the place closest to them is—

"Sector four in the western area of the nature sector huh..... it's not close to us, but not far away either. Too close to travel to by

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

aircraft, but it would take around five to six hours by the transport vehicles of *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*>."

"We can treat it as a sightseeing trip. It's a giant plain, which makes it perfect for an outing."

As Monica stared at the data, Sheltis booted up the terminal that was installed in his room for the guards' use. After keying in the ID on his badge and the password, he began applying for a four-seater transport vehicle through the Law Enforcement Bureau.

Monica watched from behind him as he was doing all that. She then suddenly pulled her face close to his.

"Oh, did Eyriey contact you or something? There is something I am quite concerned about."

"If you are talking about the same thing which I requested of Kagura, I have not received any notification yet. She said that the checks on the *machine crystal* <*Ilis*> were very time-consuming, so we may have to wait a while longer."

Did you just think of something— Monica stared hesitantly into blank space when Sheltis asked her that question.

"Well, what I am concerned about is..... it would be for the best if Eyriey and Kagura's analysis results were the same. However..... I apologize for saying this, but the possibility of that is extremely low."

"Perhaps."

It's not hard to see the reasoning behind Monica's words.

Since he had entrusted two person with the task at the same time, there should be some differences between their analysis. If that's the case, then whose result should they trust and act on?

"Who would you believe?"

"Both of them."

Sheltis shrugged his shoulders in response to the difficult question from the young girl, and continued with a relaxed voice,

"I will verify each and every area regardless of whether it came from Kagura or Eyriey. It would be our win if we discover something. If not, I'll just view it as a case of bad luck."

"If that is what you think, we may just really have to travel around the whole continent."

Monica could not help but laugh. She then turned her body away.

"Let's part for tonight. Please contact me once you have something from Eyriey."

"Understood. Well then, good night."

The girl left the room after nodding her head in acknowledgement. When he confirmed that the sounds of her footsteps have disappeared outside his door, Sheltis directed his sight back at the terminal.

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

..... There was something that he did not tell Monica earlier on.

"Is this just a coincidence? If that's the case....."

He began typing into the terminal while calming down his increased heart rate.

The registration page for transport vehicles appeared on the screen. One could see a list of people in *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*> who were using the transport vehicles.

"User: I'sa Isu Ishmeal

Purpose: Emergency orders (others)

Destination: Western area of the nature sector,
sector four"

"It's exactly the same."

He was supporting his face with his arms. On the side of his elbow was the diagram made by Kagura, which showed patterns of where the Yuugenshu might appear next.

The five ● markings represent areas of the highest possibility. Out of which, the closest ● marking to *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*> is sector four of western area of the nature sector.

In another words, the destination for the transport vehicle which he was about to apply for happened to be the same as that of the

puppeteer <I'sa> and the dual gunner <Jin>.

"Do coincidences..... really exist?"

The mission of the two is to rescue the cadet guards whom they had lost contact with, and the destination is Kagura's predicted area where the Yuugenshu will appear.

"Six hours ago, the rescue team sent a SOS signal to us. Just as *Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>* was about to ascertain the situation, there was a deafening roar from the other side of the speakers — and that was all we've got."

"The cause of their mishap is unknown."

"..... Unknown cause of mishap huh?"

Contact was lost with the team of cadet guards who were investigating the nature sector. The whereabouts of the first rescue team was also unknown. And now, they were dispatching the second team of regular guards which includes I'sa and Jin.

There was a sense of unrest in his heart..... he had an ominous feeling about it.

The loss of contact did not seem to be caused by the malfunctioning of communication devices. If that's the case, then what could it be? If it's neither the Yuugenshu nor the violent beasts, then—

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

"Hopefully, they will not get themselves into trouble."

Sheltis leaned against the back of his chair and stared into the ceiling before closing his eyes.

{3}

"Achoo! Achoo!"

Eyriey's sneezes echoed in the glamorously decorated room.

"Ah..... why the random sneezes? Is it because of the air-conditioning?"

She sniffed as she pressed her hands against her mouth.

"Or perhaps someone is talking about you."

The voice that was close to laughing came from the *machine crystal* <Ilis> besides Eyriey's arm. Its crystal part was connected to multiple wires where special equipment were used to measure her processing space.

"Hmm— who could that be? Yuto said she's going out, and Chef should be sleeping by now. Which leaves us Sheltis? Or perhaps Kagura's the unexpected winner?"

"There's an even more unexpected scenario: it may be both of them."

The *machine crystal* <Ilis> looked like she was flickering in happiness.

"Jeez. They will die of envy should they know that I am living in such a wonderful room."

She sat on the incredibly soft sofa and her body sank itself deeply into it. Her right hand was typing on the terminal. She picked up the teacup on the table with her left.

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

"Ah— speaking of which, this is really something. I never expect such a luxurious room to exist within *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*>."

Gentle rays of light were coming from the chandeliers above her head; on the carpets were the geometric images of the leaves and vines of plants. The living room is big enough for a game of hide and seek; the bathroom was built using cream-colored rocks that were polished to be as bright as crystals. The rest of the furniture were all extravagant, with examples including the velvet curtains at the windows.

The accommodation facilities located on two hundred and forty seventh story of *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*>.

It's a high-end suite that is reserved only for the VIPs from organizations like the Government Sector and etc. However, the *machine crystal* <*Ilis*> had hacked into the systems in secret and booked the room under the name of someone else and not Eyriey.

"Mmm, I love these spacious places the most. I can go all out to make machines and pile them up. My legs would not be tripped by the wires, so the incidents of short-circuiting will be reduced greatly."

"Fufu, that is just like you."

"I originally wanted to bring Yuto here as well, but she just had to go out at a time like this..... hahhhhh. Oh crap. I've relaxed myself totally after the sneeze."

She shook her head in order to resist the urge to yawn.

She had already drunk countless cups of coffee, but it looked like forty hours without any sleep or rest had finally taken its toll on her body.

"Because you have been focusing on my checkup. I am really sorry."

"Not at all — I am enjoying myself as well."

The machines required were built from scratch under the instructions of the *machine crystal* <Ilis>. Unconventional theories were utilized in the machines, and they were built via methods and materials that would not be used typically — all that had pleased Eyriey greatly.

It could probably be seen as a impetus of her creativity.

Strokes of inspiration on ways to improve the machines appeared in her mind one after another, as though they were flowing out of an endless fountain.

"Ah— give me a second. Let me record down the idea which had just came to my mind."

She fished out a notebook which was as thick as a dictionary from the pocket of her overalls. Its original thickness was not even half of its current width, but it had become thicker and thicker as she kept adding in more pages in between the original ones.

She slipped a memo paper in between a heavily scribbled page before writing down her ideas quickly on the black spaces.

"Oh. That's surprising?"

"You mean the notebook?"

"Yes. I thought you would record it down in some storage devices, but little did I expect it to be a book. I never knew you belong to that

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

camp."

From the increased pitch of the tone of the *machine crystal* <Ilis>, she did sound rather surprised.

"It's actually very inconvenient. Moreover, I've never organized its contents before, and my writing is not pretty."

"Hmm— perhaps it is due to the inconvenience it brings. The things stored in the storage devices can be copied very easily. Though you think you have already deleted the data, it is actually still stored inside the devices. If we are talking about notebooks, there will be no one but me who can decipher the contents, especially if it is something that cannot be seen by anyone else."

"....."

"Is that weird?"

"N-Not at all! I think it's a really great idea!"

The *machine crystal* <Ilis> flickered in a fluster.

"Ahaha, there is no need for you to be polite with me."

"T-That's not it..... You may laugh at me since I am saying this as a machine, but I can't help myself but to think of the past when I look at you just now..... So I wandered about in the vast sea of data for a while and was lost in sadness."

"Oh? Things of the past?"

"She's a girl who's very much like you. She too

would always record things down on her notebook, and her explanation was: 'It will be really embarrassing if it is seen by others'. Urm, she is a mechanic like you as well."

"Heeh?"

What an interesting mechanic. Her reason for using the notebook was exactly the same.

"Is she really like me?"

"She was totally a carbon-copy of you, right down to the looks and personality— ah, however, she is quite a muddle-head. For example, she would definitely neglect something important when she was asked to come up with a design document. In comparison, you of the current era is more outstanding than her."

"....."

Despite the calm tone of the *machine crystal* <Ilis>, there was no hiding for her emotions within — it sounded like she was introducing someone who is very important to her.

"She must be someone very important to Ilis, is she not?"

"She is."

After pondering on the *machine crystal* <Ilis>'s answer repeatedly.

—Ahh, so that's the reason why Ilis requested me to perform a check on her.

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

"Anything wrong?"

"Nope, nothing."

Eyriey quickly retracted the smile at the corner of her lips.

..... She must have overlapped that important person.....

..... Overlapped her memories of that important person with me.....

The *machine crystal* <Ilis> did not realize it. She might have done so unknowingly.

The reason she asked me over when Sheltis was in the hospital must have been because she was very lonely, and that made her subconsciously sought someone whom she yearns to rely on, isn't it? She looked for me since I am the person who is most similar to that person.

—Jeez.

—She's such a hopelessly adorable machine, and yet is as fragile as a human at the very same time.

"There, there. Ilis is a good girl."

"Eh..... H-Hold on, Eyirey, don't touch me like that! I-It's ticklish!"

The response of the *machine crystal* <Ilis> was comical when her surface was caressed by Eyriey.

"Oh right, could that person be....."

"..... Yes. She is my—"

Just then.

The *machine crystal* <Ilis> went silent all of the sudden. The crystal portion had lost its glow as well.

"E-Eh.....? Ilis? Are you feeling uncomfortable?"

She thought something had gone wrong with the checkup. However, the wires were still connected to the crystal, and the screen of the computer had no problems on it as well. It looked like there was no abnormality.

"Hello— Ilis? Did you fall asleep?"

".....Ah, s-sorry. There was interesting information in the network of *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*>, so I couldn't help but to get my hands on it."

"You went to retrieve data? You can't do that, Ilis. The checks will not be accurate if you continue to do things like that..... though that is what I wanted to say, but I guess you should have known that already."

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

In other words, the information is much more important than the current things in hand.

And it appeared deep into the night when everyone should be sound asleep?

"It seems like they are about to carry out an emergency meeting in the headquarters of the Guards Command that is established within the Law Enforcement Bureau..... The level of secrecy was actually determined by the royal decree of the Queen. It looks like the Priestesses and the Sennenshi will be participating in the meeting."

"That sounds very serious."

Even though a commoner like Eyriey has no idea about the detailed protocol, it should be no trivial matter if the Priestesses are summoned in the middle of the night — what exactly is going on here?

"Could it be the Yuugenshu?"

"Nope. They would have carried out some other special protocols should that be the case. Things are different this time round — the only thing for sure is something serious has happened. I will go and take a look."

With that, the *machine crystal* <Ilis> became silent once more.

Chapter 4

1 hour — l'sa —

{1}

— Something felt wrong.

Sheltis leaped up from his bed when he was assaulted by a strange, indescribable feeling.

"..... What's going on?"

The clock on the wall showed it was three. It was not quite morning yet - it was a time that was in limbo between midnight and morning. Sheltis and the other cadet guards would not do their morning training at a time like this. That was right, everyone should still be sound asleep.

..... Why was it so noisy?

The commotion was the cause for him to wake up all of a sudden. And that was coming from outside of his room — the corridor.

It was not like there was a ruckus happening outside. Instead, people were walking with an unnaturally quiet manner as not to

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

disturb those who were still in their dreams. Was it a squad that was setting off in the morning? No, there was way too many people for that to be true.

What is happening? The atmosphere is really heavy.

It like he was pulled into a quagmire — the atmosphere was difficult to breathe in. He had experienced that feeling countless times already. Whenever that happens, his ominous feelings always comes true.

— Let's take a look at what is going on.

He opened the door slowly.

A few people happened to pass by the door just as he opened it. One of them was a tall lady who had blended herself into the dark thanks to her blue suit. The cigarette in her mouth was burning like a phantom light.

"..... Instructor Yumelda?"

"Oh. It's you, Sheltis."

His instructor turned her head around. Behind her were several guards who were wearing pure white ceremonial clothing with the badge of regular guards sewn onto their shoulders.

— So I was right. What's happening?

There was no reason for an instructor to lead a large number of

guards in the middle of the night with normal circumstances. If that was the case, then it was only during emergencies when.....

"The cause of their mishap is unknown. The rescue headquarters has deemed the situation to be serious, and has thus decided to dispatch an official team which comprises of regular guards and apprentice-Priestesses for the rescue mission. I'sa and I are summoned to the team."

A sole reason appeared in his mind.

"Could it be..... Instructor!?"

"I see. Looks like I am quite unlucky to bump into you."

The Instructor put on one of her rare bitter smile and bit hard onto the end of the cigarette.

"I've no time to explain since I am on my way to a meeting..... head to the twenty-second story if you think it is something that concerns you."

Twenty-second story. That is the floor where the tower's hospital is located at, the place where he received treatment only a few days ago.

"..... Just what is going on around here?"

He could clearly feel the trembling of his clenched fists.

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

Sweat streaked past his cheek down towards his chin. Despite the burning sensation on his face, it felt like his spine was stung by a chill as cold as ice.

"Ugh!"

"Sheltis!"

He suppressed his urge to make his move after hearing the roar from the instructor.

"Remember this — don't you dare do anything reckless. We've already decided to send in the third squad — the team led by Sennenshi Run."

"....."

Sheltis turned his body and ran in the direction of the elevator without giving a reply.

* * *

He was greeted by a blinding light when the door of the elevator opened.

..... It's still lit up at a time like this?

He made his way quickly through the blinding corridor while suppressing his anxiety. After turning past the final corner that led him to the hospital's counter, what appeared before his eyes was—

The scene of countless injured guards lying in front of him.

"..... That was just appalling."

The cadet guards on the beds looked incredibly weak. Their pure white ceremonial clothing were stained with dirt while the emergency bandages were stained with fresh blood.

Hollers and instructions were flying across the room.

Doctors were flipping through medical records quickly and communicating with each other in loud voices. As for the nurses, they were dashing through the narrow pathways with both their arms filled with medical supplies.

"Move to the side! Stop blocking the way!"

Stretchers were hurriedly transported past the place he was originally standing in. Not just one, but two, three..... The numbers would be astounding if there were more stretchers that were unable to get on the elevator during the first trip.

Why have things become like this?

"What's happening.....!"

He bit his lower lip and squeezed his way past the crowd and the counter. As he moved towards the treatment rooms that were located inside, he checked the injuries on each and every cadet guard he could see.

Finally.

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

Sheltis stopped in his tracks when he saw a dual gunner lying on a bed and a girl with her head lowered in silence as she sat quietly on the bench at the side.

"I'sa?"

"..... You're that..... dual sword wielder....."

The young girl lifted her head. Her eyes were red and puffy.

The sleeves of her ceremonial clothing were filled with holes, revealing the purplish skin beneath them — haematoma. Her legs beneath her skirt were covered with dirt as well.

However, what was surprising was the fact that she was the only person to suffer from light injuries, compared to the rest of the guards who were unable to move.

"It's..... uhh....."

The young girl was close to crying.

"..... Jin, he..... protected me....."

The comatose dual gunner was placed on a respirator.

—Mmm.

So that was the reason for the strange feeling he had when he first saw them.

"..... I don't get it. What exactly happened?"

"What happened?"

I'sa's voice rose by a pitch as she glared at him.

"What happened..... that's what I'll like to know as well.....
why..... why have things become like this....."

Sheltis stared at girl silently, whose shoulders were trembling nonstop. She did not require his words now; what she need was time to calm down so she can break away from her terrified state.

I'sa regained her calm after a while.

"..... Sorry, I got emotional."

The young girl took in a deep breath to regulate her irregular breathing. What a strong girl she was — she actually suppressed her panic forcibly with pride and reasoning. Sheltis was deeply in awe of her mental fortitude.

"I should be the one apologizing. Pardon my rudeness."

"No..... you made your way here despite the early hours. Thank you."

I'sa took yet another deep breath as she gripped her left arm tightly with her right.

"You should know this by now. Jin and I were dispatched to rescue

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

the two teams..... the team whom we initially lost contact with, as well as the first rescue team who suffered from the same fate. Both teams' communication were broken off at the same location."

"The western area of the nature sector?"

"So you did your homework.....? You're right."

— Just as I've thought.

Interpreting his silence as acknowledgement, I'sa continued with much difficulty,

"It's the fourth sector, at an area that consists of large plains. The cadet guards of both teams had all collapsed there..... To be honest, we did not expect ourselves to locate them that quickly, so we all thought the mission would be an easy one."

However..... the young girl's lips began to tremble. He could detect fear in her voice; terror could be clearly seen from her drooping eyes.

"However, Jin felt that something was wrong after seeing those collapsed guards. It's quite normal to, right? I mean, both teams had collapsed on the empty plains. It's as if....."

"Someone moved them there?"

The teams were downed at another location. They were then shifted to a faraway place so as to keep the location a secret.

"Mmm. There were traces on the plains suggesting that the cadet guards were dragged from another place. We left the remaining two members behind to provide medical treatment to the collapsed guards. Jin and I then followed the trails and began our investigation..... and then....."

"We met..... a monster."

"..... What do you mean by a monster?"

Sheltis could not help but to reconfirm his doubt after hearing the strange term from the young girl.

There was nothing on the floating continent that could be classified under the term 'monster'. If they were talking about Yuugenshu - creatures that threaten the human race - they would be referred to by their name. If they were harmful beasts like dragons and etc, they will be referred to by their general species.

"Not Yuugenshu or harmful beasts, but a monster?"

"He's a human being."

"..... Wait, a human being? Three teams were defeated by a single person?"

"Mmm, that's right. But, somehow..... it somehow feels like we were not fighting against a human. It was a one-sided fight..... we could not even retaliate. We were unable to resist or defend ourselves..... You can even say it's a fight between the strong and the weak..... that's how much of a monster the opponent was."

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

..... How could that be possible?

The unconscious guards in the infirmary looked like they were suffering from all sorts of injuries: incisions caused by sharp weapons; contusions by what looks to be from huge iron balls; some of their bodies were filled with bruises all over as though they were thrashed about by wrestling techniques.

It was hard to imagine that a single person could deal such a wide variety of injuries.

"Can you give me more details?"

"Why do you want to know? What's the point?"

I'sa asked with self-depreciating laughter.

"Now's not the time for a cadet guard like you to take the stage. Queen Salah has already passed down the royal decree by giving orders for Run's squad to sortie..... she must have deemed the task to be beyond the means of regular and cadet guards."

The young girl laughed in disdain.

The laughter was filled with grief as well.

"..... I..... couldn't do..... anything..... Jin protected me..... and despite him collapsing right before me..... I....."

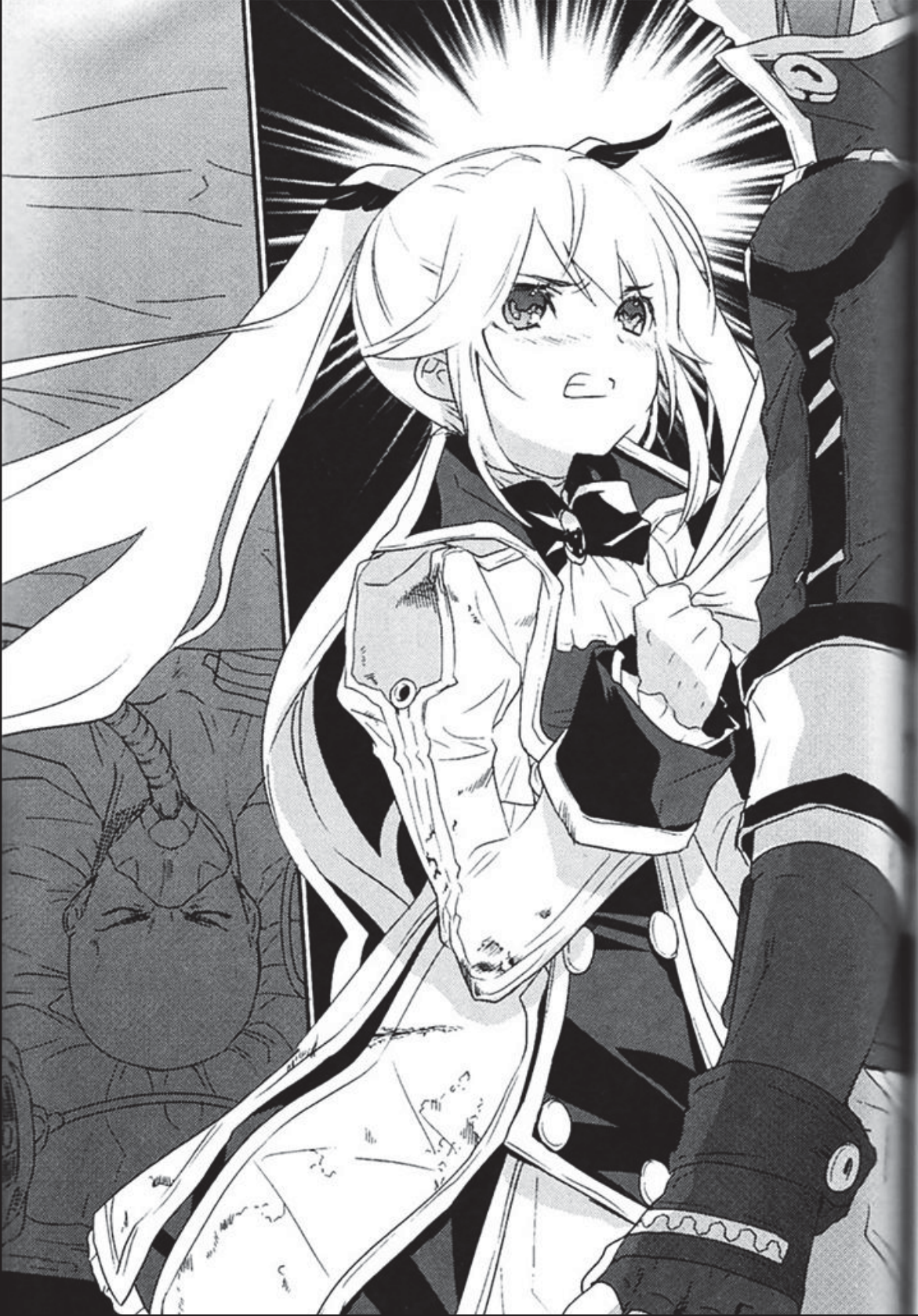
Her fist placed on top of her thighs were trembling nonstop

The young girl suddenly stood up from her chair.

"Why..... Tell me why!? I..... I too wish to have my revenge on Jin's behalf..... but why..... why am I so pathetically weak!?"

All that happened in an instant.

I'sa grabbed Sheltis by the collar of his coat and pulled him into her gaze.



"Are the regular guards..... really that useless.....? Can we depend only on Sennenshi like Captain Run or the higher ranked elite guards during real times of trouble.....?"

The young girl bit onto her lips in an attempt to stop herself from crying. Despite that, large tears were still falling from her eyes.

"—You know."

The young girl lowered her head while gripping onto Sheltis' collar tightly. She then continued choppily,

"..... I could not accept the results..... of our fight against you, so I told Jin it must be because luck was on your side. But do you know what Jin said to me? That idiot actually said..... 'Really? I thought it was something very interesting'....."

"Yeah, I thought it was interesting. Think about it, I'sa. If a cadet guard could defeat regular guards, then it may not be impossible for us regular guards to win against the elite guards."

"If so— don't you think we should thank the dual sword wielder for bringing us a glimmer of hope?"

"What a joke..... how can he be so certain and optimistic about it?"

The dual gunner had a respirator on his face. He was receiving treatment after suffering heavy injuries from protecting I'sa. But to Sheltis, those lines sounded like they were coming straight from

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

the person himself.

"..... I..... I..... Why....."

Her hands on his collars were trembling weakly.

She could not stand up on her own, and yet her pride did not allow her to depend on others. Thus— the young girl could only barely support herself by grabbing onto the young man's collars tightly.

"..... Therefore."

An almost inaudible voice.

A sound as faint as a drop of rain falling onto grass.

"..... I should not be requesting the help of an outsider.....
However."

The young girl took a deep breath.

"—— Please help me..... take care of Jin."

I'sa pushed Sheltis on his shoulders to move herself away from him. Her face cringed in pain from the aggravation of her injuries. She turned her wobbly body away.

The young girl then dragged herself towards the door of the infirmary.

"This is my personal problem. It's an obligation..... that's between Jin and me."

Where is she going? The answer was obvious even without asking.

She was planning to sortie.

She wanted to take on the enemy by herself despite her injuries and the fact that she could not match up against him even with the combined efforts of Jin and herself. She even agreed that she has no chance of victory, but she could not allow herself to sit around and do nothing.

"You want to take revenge for Jin?"

"..... That's none of your concern."

I'sa continued walking as she tore away the unnecessary bandages on her arm.

— I can't let things end like this.

Sheltis could understand the feelings of I'sa very well.

But..... even if I understand her feelings, can I really let her go?

Despite knowing the injuries on her body, do I still let her do as she wishes?

Or should I stop her even if it means I have to trample on her current feelings?

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

Or—

"..... If I can help I'sa....."

Just as he was mumbling to himself, the warning from Instructor Yumelda suddenly flashed past his mind.

"Don't you dare do anything reckless."

"..... So that's what she meant."

Sheltis put on a bitter expression when he realized the meaning behind his instructor's words.

Should the Yuugenshu attack, any unauthorized solitary actions may expose *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*> and the Priestesses to danger. That's the reason why cadet guards are drafted into teams and preached the importance of working as a team.

..... If I help I'sa now.

..... I'll be creating trouble for Monica since I've already agreed to team up with her.

Should he join I'sa, they would definitely be punished severely if they failed. That would cause trouble for Monica, and he would also be further away from his goal of becoming a regular guard. That would result in his promise with Ymy becoming out of his reach.

Should I risk it to help I'sa?

..... I'll have consider it carefully.

The reason he entered *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*> was so that he can fulfill his promise with Ymy. He was an irregular who had fallen into the *Garden of Corrupted Song* <*Eden*>, and that had caused many inconveniences for him. He could not act recklessly, nor did he have any spare attention left to care about others.

I'sa's behavior stemmed from her own will, so it had nothing to do with him at all. Considering his current situation as well as his promise with Ymy, that should be the logical conclusion.

..... However.

"—That's..... not the point!"

Sheltis lifted his lowered head as he clenched his fists tightly.

..... I'll definitely regret it if I do not help I'sa.

Even if he managed to become a regular guard or perhaps even a Sennenshi — if he kept ignoring the troubles of others like he did today, would he be able to lift his head up high in front of Ymy when he finally achieved his goal?

..... There would be no way he could do it.

Three years ago, he was chasing the backs of the Sennenshi blindly without ever understanding the sufferings of the Priestesses as well as the responsibilities of the Sennenshi.

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

At the age of only fourteen, he was still too childish to understand the significance between the bonds of the Priestesses and their Sennenshi.

But things are different now.

He finally realized it was the process that was the most important in the path of becoming a Sennenshi.

"I....."

He clenched his teeth and fists as he looked at the girl who had her back to him.

"..... I had sworn I'll never repeat the mistakes I made before."

"Eh?"

I'sa turned her head around in shock when she heard his voice coming from behind her. Sheltis nodded his head hard in reply to her gaze.

..... Isn't that right, Ymy?

He would never make decisions that would put himself in shame when he finally face Ymy as a Sennenshi.

Because back then, Ymy—

"As a Priestess, I can only maintain the barrier — but I believe that everyone here can do much more things that I can possibly do.

You should not work hard all by yourselves. Rather, you should do what you can do and help others by doing so. I hope everyone can build a relation where people will help each other."

..... That was right, Ymy was the one who said that.

His childhood friend was so incredibly dazzling and honest when she voiced out her ideals calmly. She is a really kind girl.

I've decided to protect Ymy precisely because of the way she is.

So there's no reason for me to hesitate any longer.

Even if he had to take a detour after helping I'sa — even if that was not the shortest possible path in his quest to become a Sennenshi, he would still move onward bravely.

"I'sa."

"..... What?"

She knitted her eyebrows with a bewildered expression.

"You can't go."

"Ha! What's this? Are you trying to stop me? I've said earlier on that it is my problem—"

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

"It has to be you who takes care of Jin, no?"

"..... Well..... But what do you want me to do!? Who will take revenge for Jin if I am to stay here?"

"I'll go in your stead."

"..... What!? What are you talking about?"

"I'sa, you can stay by his side. I'll be fine by myself."

"Are you joking—"

"I'm serious."

That was his only answer.

And with that, he flashed a smile at the girl who was glaring at him. He directed his gaze towards the comatose dual gunner while the girl's eyes widened in surprise.

"It may be strange for me to be saying this now, but I was really happy when you two invited me to the mission. Even within the cadet guards, Monica is the only person who has ever said that to me — and so, thanks for inviting me."

"..... That's your reason?"

"That's very important to me, just like how important Jin is to you."

"....."

The young girl became silent.

Just as Sheltis walked past her,

"I was trying my hardest not to ask a favor from you....."

I'sa held back her sniffles. She then lifted her head suddenly.

"I was thinking, why must a regular guard like me humble herself towards a mere cadet guard..... That's the reason why I forced myself not to say it just now."

"Mmm."

He could understand her feelings very well. The girl's eyes were searching for hope despite her painful expressions as she tried her hardest not to seek his assistance — that was more than enough for him to understand her reasons behind her actions.

"..... Are you really willing to do it for our sake?"

"I am not someone that great, nor do I have capability to devote my attention to the matters of others. I am just a cadet guard."

Sheltis shook his head and flashed a smile at the girl who had lifted her head in order to look at him.

"It's more of me acting according to my feelings, so there's no need for I'sa to feel like you're owing me anything — I am doing it for myself. That's all there is to it."

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

"....."

She became silent once more. And then—

"..... I thank you on behalf of Jin."

On behalf of Jin? Just as he was about to ask,

"I'll reserve my thanks till you return back in triumph..... is that okay?"

"That's more than enough."

Sheltis couldn't help but to smile at the girl who had finally returned back to her stubborn self.

That was right, that stubborn personality of the puppeteer suited her best.

"Another thing. I..... am not too sure if I heard it right, but our opponent said this during our fight..... 'there's nineteen hours left'."

"And when did you guys fight?"

"In the evening..... at about five."

It was currently four in the morning of the following day. That meant eleven hours out of the nineteen had already passed by, so there were only eight hours left. Adding that to their current time—

— That falls right at noon.

Even if he was to get on a transport vehicle and make his way to the nature sector immediately, there was no guarantee that he would be able to make it on time.

"Be careful. He's a puppeteer just like me, but he's way more than just that."

"Mmm."

"..... You'll definitely win and return safely, right?"

I'sa suddenly stretched her fist into the air.

Sheltis replied by doing the same thing as well.

"Definitely."

They knocked their fists into each other with a thud. A sound of promise reverberated gently within the room.

And with that, Sheltis left the infirmary.

— Let's go. Just like the things Ymy had said to everyone with all her courage.....

— I..... just want to do all that I can.

Silence.

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

Her ears were almost in pain from the deafening silence. The temperature of the room had frozen everything, even the flowing of the air.

A sacred sanctuary that was totally different from the typical space where humans live in.

It was the two hundred and eighty-first story. The Grand Holy Hall.

The brass ritual equipment were giving off a golden luster. There was a giant stained glass with images of the moon and stars. The ceiling was painted in blue to symbolize the firmament.

To the apprentice-Priestesses, this hall is the place where the results of the final test to become a Priestess will be revealed. To the Priestesses however, this was a special place for prayers that was used during the rituals.

"_____"

Ymy, the only person in the hall, was sitting down with her eyes closed.

She was kneeling motionlessly on the hard, icy floor. Her breathing was incredibly faint. She had consciously lowered the functions of her body to achieve a state of suspended animation, thus freeing her thoughts from the restraints of the distractions caused by her body — from the distractions of coldness, headaches, hunger and sleep deprivation.

Tranquil Heart.

To the Priestesses, it was something that is basic and yet profound at the same time. It is also her senior Priestess's favorite method of focusing her mind whenever she needs to be calm with her thoughts.

..... A way to purify mateki.

..... Queen Salah told me that a way does exists.

She listened to her voice that was echoing endlessly in her mind. To Ymy, that felt like she was talking to another copy of herself.

..... My current shinryoku spells of the baptism arts are more than enough to deal with mateki which contaminates human beings.

..... Well then, what if the mateki assimilate itself into the whole body instead of contaminating it?

..... And also, what should I do if that mateki is strong enough to rival the powers within me?

Her thoughts flowed endlessly.

New ideas merged with the old ones which were replayed nonstop in her mind as if in a whirlpool.

..... Currently, my shinryoku repels Sheltis' mateki.

..... But to look at it from another perspective, does that mean I'll be able to eliminate his mateki if we do not trigger Elbert

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

Resonance?

..... Does this method really exist?

"_____"

She endured the discomfort from the stinging rays as she opened her eyes amid the holy hall that was doused in light. At the same time, the severed sense of her body were beginning to reawaken as well.

"..... It's cold."

The metallic floor had sapped away the heat from her already frozen knees.

Ymy bit onto her lips softly as she pressed her fingers that were soaked with the chilliness of the holy hall onto her face.

"To think that the human body can become as cold as this....."

Her hands were frozen and her breaths, icy.

She yearned for some warmth; she wanted to hold his hands.

"But it will not do to just wait..... Queen Salah said so as well."

She would have to seek the answer proactively as the Priestess of Baptism.

There must be a way for me to be able to touch him again. And I

must find it.

"I will have to work hard..... because I am a Priestess as well."

Ymy nodded her head with her pursed lips as she closed her eyes once more.

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

{2}

"..... Gotta move fast."

Sheltis dashed into his room on the eleventh story and kicked his wardrobe open.

A pair of metal sheaths gave off a black luster.

They were made from chromium porcelain and constructed specifically for dual swords. The *machine crystal* <Ilis> had them prepared for him just in case — he never thought he would actually use them.

He took out the twin blades hidden beneath his bed and slid them into the sheaths before securing them onto the fasteners located on his back.

— The fourth sector of the western area of the nature sector.

The 'person' who attacked the members of *Tenketsu Palace* <Sophia> was at one of the spots predicted by Kagura, where the Yuugenshu may appear.

There are only eight hours left.

The deadline mentioned by I'sa fell at exactly noon today.

He did not know the implications behind it, but it was definitely something bad. And in order to prevent that from happening—

"Run..... is unlikely to make it."

The first story of *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*>.

Sheltis reached the pathway and dashed past the empty lobby.

It would be much better if he could team up with a Sennenshi, but she must have teamed up with the elite guards by now.

The disadvantage of moving as a team was the time spent on logistics. Gathering group members, preparing the transport vehicles and ironing out a battle plan — it will be past dawn by the time everything is done. If so, it is unlikely for them to make it to the fourth sector before noon.

I'sa must have realized that as well. That was why she insisted on sortieing alone.

"..... Monica will probably stop me if she comes to know of this."

Is it because he disobeyed the instructions from the instructor? Actually— she would probably stop him all the same even considering that. Monica would definitely not allow her teammate to head to the battlefield when his body was not even in the condition to undertake any training..... That was just the way she was; the girl who cared for her companions from the bottom of her heart despite her past struggles to become a Priestess.

That is why he must not say it.

He had to start and end everything silently.

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

"The hangar should be located here."

He slipped past the passageway reserved for the members of *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*> to make his way out of the tower. The world was shrouded in darkness and the cries of birds were nowhere to be heard. Only the edges of the sky were dyed in a pale white.

He ran all the way to the outdoor training area. A large rectangular shadow began to slowly appear before his eyes. The white walls under the bright illumination of the lights and the large shutter in the center of the walls were becoming closer and closer.

It was the hangar — a depot under the care of the Law Enforcement Bureau, where tens of transport vehicles were parked in the building.

"..... I'm not too familiar with this, but I guess it will have to do."

Sheltis had his eyes set on a two-wheeled high-speed electric vehicle. Since he was travelling alone, that vehicle offers a higher top speed and better maneuverability compared with a transport vehicle.

Just then—

"This model will be better if you want to head to the nature sector."

A strong ray of light shone down from the hangar's ceiling.

"Type 21 of the floating models, with the largest horsepower rated seven hundred and fifty Joules. Its maximum speed may not be comparable to that model there, but since it travels by a floatation device instead of wheels, it will produce a much smoother ride at the unpaved areas of the nature sector."

The person who switched on the lights of the hangar was a young girl with a mechanical helmet and visor on her head — and as she pointed towards a dark blue floating vehicle, she said,

"Geez, thank goodness I did not slacken in my monitoring of you."

"..... Kagura?"

"From your expressions, you're wondering why I am here, am I right? As much as I do not want to, with a large number of regular and elite guards gathering for a meeting this early in the morning, it is inevitable for me to wonder if something bad has happened."

Kan — Kagura gave the blue vehicle a light kick.

"Monica knows about how I've secretly installed hundreds of surveillance camera inside and outside of the tower. Part of the reason is due to my personal interests, and the other half is because I was approached by the Towers Control to do so. Upon noticing the commotion outside of my room, I activated the screen and voila — as I expected, I saw a certain someone running breathlessly."

And of course, that person was none other than you.

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

The young girl took a dig deliberately at Sheltis.

"To think you came down to this hangar in secret despite the early hours..... I want to be around during the investigation of the Yuugenshu — didn't I say so before?"

"It's not that, Kagura. Listen—"

He suddenly withheld his words.

No, I can't waste any more time explaining.

"The place I am going to..... is the western area of the nature sector. The fourth sector."

"Oh, so you are really going to investigate on the Yuugenshu. The place is exactly the same as that found in my data—"

"I am not investigating the Yuugenshu."

"Why?"

"I don't have any time left to explain. Can you please let me off the hook this once?"

Hmm— Kagura thought in silence as she placed her finger on her lips.

"Looks like you are really in a hurry. Fine, I'll not question you any further at a time like this — on the condition that I'll be tagging along as well."

..... Just as I thought.

Sheltis had already braced himself for a request like that.

"I don't think this is that bad a condition. I promise I'll not divulge anything about today if I get to come along with you. How about I drive this vehicle instead? It will definitely be a more comfortable ride if I am to drive it instead of you."

"..... Are you that insistent on figuring out my motives?"

"Yes. You're even hiding it from Monica. So where exactly are you going? I promise I'll keep it a secret if you allow me to come along, even from Monica."

What to do? Considering her personality, Kagura will definitely pester him with more questions should he reject her now. He no longer has any time to waste.

"..... Alright. But promise me this: you are to run away immediately when you sense any danger."

"And that seals the deal."

Nodding her head, the young girl climbed into the driver's seat of the vehicle.

"Here, you can take the co-driver's seat. The breeze of dawn is very comfortable at this time of day."

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

{3}

The howling of the wind.

While travelling on the electric vehicle that sped through the road, the wind that brushed past his ears made a shrill as sharp as that of a flute. There was an indescribable sadness in the sound of the wind.

..... It was the same as back then.

The large-scale invasion by the Yuugenshu against *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*>. It sounded just like the cry of the wind back when he squared off against the commanding body in mid-air, two thousand meters above the ground. It was the wailing sound of the wind that was pouring into the floating continent.

"Sheltis, Sheltis! Can you hear me!?"

"Eh? Ah, yeah. I'm fine."

Kagura, who was sitting in the driver's seat before him, inquired with her voice that was raised a pitch. Sheltis tapped her shoulder in response.

"Anything wrong? You look out of sorts."

"I'm just thinking of something."

"And that's looking out of sorts. Geez..... 'You are to run away

immediately when you sense any danger' — you are the one who told me that, you know?"

The young girl sighed.

"Then again, is it really true that everyone in the team of regular guards were defeated?"

"There is no point in hiding this from you. The instructor should be announcing it to the cadet guards today."

"..... That's just unbelievable."

"I can't believe it as well, but....."

"That's not what I meant. I am referring to you."

Kagura increased her grip on the steering wheel.

"We're talking about a monster who crushed two teams of cadet guards and a team of regular guard which included apprentice-Priestesses in its setup..... Why are you planning to take on that person alone should he really exists? Is it because the regular guard I'sa came crying to you? Or are you affected by the heroism of the dual gunner named Jin? In any case, that's just too reckless of you, isn't it?"

"..... You're right."

Sheltis flashed a light smile after hearing the lengthy speech from Kagura.

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

"Perhaps it's just as you've said. No, I think that's really it. Monica will probably stop me if she comes to know of this..... It's strange, isn't it? I mean, my body has not recovered fully, and my doctor barely gave me permission to practice on my swordplay for no more than an hour a day."

"Then why?"

"Why huh? Probably because..... I am really happy about the fact that they did not shun me."

He was an irregular cadet guard who possessed exceptional skills and had attracted the attention of others due to that. As the only person who wore a black jacket all the time, he also hid his past from others.

But just like Monica, the two of them invited him into their team despite knowing all that.

"It may be too late for me to say this, but I do really feel that if I had joined them in the mission back then..... I might have been able to help them somehow."

"I see....."

Kiiii— the electric vehicle made a sudden stop in midair.

The vehicle that floated a few centimeters off the ground began to descend slowly. The sound of the engine slowly disappeared as well.

"We've reached our destination. The fourth sector of the western

area of the nature sector. I've parked the electric vehicle here just as you've instructed. Are you really planning to scout on foot?"

"Mmm. The fourth sector's not large, so it's much more convenient for me to survey the place with my own legs."

..... Three hours left huh.

The electronic display on the vehicle showed nine o'clock. Sheltis leaped off the electric vehicle hastily after confirming the time and landed on the lush green grounds beneath him. He then made his way towards the entrance of the gently sloping and endlessly wide plains. He will have to cover the large plains at least once in the next three hours.

"Are you okay with walking?"

"I will keep up just fine. I'm not a child anymore."

Sheltis flashed a wry smile in the direction of the girl who was throwing a tantrum and began walking towards the plains.

"Hold on Sheltis..... wait for me!"

As he turned his head backwards, he saw Kagura running towards him hastily from a distance of more than ten meters away from him.

"Can you be more aware of your surroundings? You're walking way too fast."

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

"R-Really?"

In actual fact, he did cut down his speed to accommodate Kagura.

Back when he walked along with Monica at the *Floating Archipelagos* <Lagoon>, his pace was much faster than this despite the fact that they were walking on rough terrains filled with the roots of trees.

"The distance between us will increase with each step due to my small size. Ah..... d-don't you misunderstand! I am definitely not saying that my legs are short!"

..... She's really talkative.

Kagura forms a strong contrast to Monica's reserved personality.

"Sorry, but I have to speed up my pace."

"I know that. It's not like I am walking so slowly for no reason though. I have been gathering data while we were walking."

The young girl continued walking as she typed on a floating mechanical sphere.

The reason for her lagging behind was not just due to her walking speed; it was mainly because she focused her attention on the bewildering controls.

"I'm curious about that floating sphere. Is that a machine?"

"You've finally asked. This is my masterpiece out of all of my inventions."

Kagura happily caressed the mechanical sphere that was floating before her chest.

It was a perfect sphere with a circumference that's roughly the length of a child's hug. There was a metallic luster to its color, making it obvious that it was a machine of some sort.

"This little thing here is a '*machine pearl* <*Machina*>'. To put it simply, it's a portable computer. Also known as a 'large mobile computer', this thing here can connect itself to the main computer located in my lab and process calculations at extreme speeds. Just as you've seen, thrusters are included in its frame so that it can move along by my side."

He processed her words in his brain for a brief moment.

The first thing that came to Sheltis' mind was the girl in overalls who loved to invent things.

"That sounds just like something that Eyriey would invent."

"She would not invent something like this."

The young girl suddenly stopped in her tracks.

"That's right, she has disdain for things like this. She has zero interest..... in these high-performance, practical and ordinary things."

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

"That's ordinary? I think it's pretty impressive."

"..... I have quite a few opinions about your response, but I guess I'll take it as a praise from you for now. Speaking of which, you're friends with Eyriey, right? Did she talk about me before? For example, how's her appraisal of me?"

"Well, like how you're incredibly strong when it comes to machines and calculations."

"..... I guess."

Phew— Kagura heaved a sigh which sounded a little disheartening. That should be a word of praise, so why is she putting on such a sad smile?

"Eyriey also said she always loses whenever she's competing against you."

"That's right, I did win all the time..... but that's just how it looks like in the eyes of an ordinary person."

The young girl resumed her steps after a brief pat on the *machine pearl* <*Machina*>.

"Let's chat while we walk. The first time I met her was at the <<Homemade-Calculator Contest>> held by the Mechanical Bureau of *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*>. It's a major event where thousands of enthusiasts from all over the floating continent gather to pit their skills against one another."

"I heard that from Eyriey before..... so the Mechanical Bureau will organize these strange events from time to time."

"It's because we have a bunch of cute weirdos gathered at the Mechanical Bureau as well. But putting that aside, I won by an overwhelming margin in the preliminary theory papers as well as the semi-finals. To be honest, I was a little disappointed by how easy my wins were..... however."

The young girl pouted fiercely.

"I was stunned when I saw the scores for my competitor in the finals. Her scores for the preliminary theory papers as well as the semi-finals were way above those of mine. I guess you should know by now, that person is none other than—"

"Eyriey?"

"That's right. The topic on the final decisive round is 'Destruction that Brings about Creation'. We are to build from scratch a brand new calculator that breaks itself free from the constraints of the current calculators in two hours time. My creation is a calculator that not only retains its original functions, it can also create documents, send emails and doubles as a music player. Needless to say, the judges are in full praise of my creation. They thought it's good enough 'to be mass-produced immediately and sold to the public'."

"To think you can actually create such high performance machines in a mere time-span of two hours....."

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

But of course— Kagura nodded calmly in response to that. Perhaps it was really nothing to her.

"Back then, I thought to myself: I had it in the bag for sure. However, when Eyriey's calculator was revealed..... that was the first time in my life that I was in awe of something. That girl is definitely my destined rival whom I must overcome."

"..... Is her invention really that great?"

"It can explode."

"Eh?"

What did she just say?

"Eyriey created an 'Incredibly High Performance and High-Powered Fireworks Calculator'. Think about it, a calculator displays the digits from 0 to 9, isn't that so? Upon keying in a predetermined series of commands, it will create a huge explosion three seconds later and shoot the fireworks into the air.

The colors and scale of the fireworks will differ according to the digits keyed into it. Even the pyrotechnic experts would bow their head in defeat after seeing a design like that."

"....."

"And so her calculator blew itself up along with the the audience as well as the judges. It's a firework of immense firepower and artistic merit. The fleeting beauty that was displayed live right before my

eyes..... It was as though I was gazing at the starry skies above me—"

"That's crazy. There's no way that thing is good."

"What are you talking about? Look, what matters most to a researcher is creativity. An ordinary person will not come up with things like a fireworks calculator that explodes — and even if they do come up with the idea, no one will actually make it. However, the judges decided that I am the unanimous winner..... Those amateurs. It's obvious that Eyriey's the deserved winner."

"Nope. If you include their hatred towards Eyriey thanks to the explosion, I think it was a rather fair result."

However, the girl who was walking beside him could not accept whatever he had said.

"And that's the same for the later competitions as well. She keeps creating things that are way beyond my imagination — for example, an automated prank-calling phone; or an anti-cockroach rocket launcher..... Before I know it, I was already deeply interested in her inventions. I always wondered, 'What will Eyriey come up with this time?'. However, the judges will always rule the results in my favor as they cannot appreciate the ingenuity of Eyriey's inventions..... that's just silly. It's obvious that those victories belongs to Eyriey alone."

I see. In everyone else's eyes, the winner is Kagura; however, Kagura herself is in favor of Eyriey. That explains Kagura's rivalry towards Eyriey, and also Eyriey for saying 'I am the one who always loses'.

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

"Hmm..... I'm more or less understands what's going on. But I am a little skeptical about the criterion for winning."

"Plenty of people say that. This is what you mean by the battle of the powerful against the strong — I guess it's to be expected, since this battle is way above the levels of what the ordinary people could comprehend."

Ahem— Kagura cleared her throat.

"Moving back to the topic of the *machine pearl* <*Machina*>. Actually, this little thing here is what stores all the data that I had gathered in *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*>. The equipment in the laboratory are actually used specifically for processing."

"Then it must be really important."

"Definitely. It also stores the data of the dual sword wielder from three years ago — the person whom Monica admires."

A wild gush of wind swept by his feet, almost unbalancing him in the process.

"Putting Monica aside, there's something that I'd like to discuss with you alone."

"..... Do we have to talk about it right now?"

"Don't worry, you can listen to me as we walk. Moreover, this is quite a silly speculation and inference from me. A simple suspicion,

a fantasy..... and a story."

Kagura remained walking in front of Sheltis with the floating *machine pearl* <Machina> by her side.

"Monica said the main reason she became a guard was because of a dual sword wielder whom she used to admire. He was a guy who rose to the ranks of the cadres guard at the young age of just fifteen. From my investigation, it seems like he shared a deep friendship with Sennenshi Leon. However, he disappeared from *Tenketsu Palace* <Sophia> three years ago. There are rumors that he was killed in action due to him falling into the *Garden of Corrupted Song* <Eden>, but the validity of that is unknown. That's because all related data about him has vanished from the main computers of *Tenketsu Palace* <Sophia>."

"..... Monica mentioned that before as well."

The main computers of *Tenketsu Palace* <Sophia> should not have his data from three years ago. When he returned back to the tower from *Garden of Corrupted Song* <Eden> two years ago, everything about him should have been treated as 'non-existent' and deleted.

"However, if we focus our attention on the current day, then it is where the problems begin to surface."

Kagura continued on without a pause.

"One month ago, a dual sword wielder came to *Tenketsu Palace* <Sophia>. Despite being a cadet guard who joined the tower only not long ago, he already possesses skills that enabled him to triumph over the regular guards. It is said that he and Sennenshi

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

Leon, Sennenshi Run plus a few Priestesses knew each other. On the other hand, all information about his past is a blank despite his unbelievable connections and skills. The only thing we know about this young man, who mentions nothing about his past, is his name and the fact that he is seventeen."

And that person is none other than you— her tone was implying that despite the fact that he could only see the side of Kagura's face.

"And with that, it makes the inference much simpler. The guy whom Monica admired was about fifteen years old back then, so that means he should be around the age of seventeen or eighteen after a span of three years. And so— the gears of the past and present finally meshed together. An incredibly skilled dual swords wielder; seventeen years of age; a deep friendship with Sennenshi Leon. Considering all these factors, there is enough basis for my doubts to become a convincing speculation."

Kagura stopped in her tracks.

She turned around slowly and stared at the black jacket that was swaying in the winds.

"Your jacket should be the old ceremonial clothing of *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*>. It might have been reworked on, but based on the results of me comparing between the data, I am certain they are both the same thing."

"You mean, that's your proof that I've stayed in *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*> before? I'm sorry, but I got it from someone else."

Kagura suddenly stopped talking.

The *machine crystal* <Ilis> did warn him about his jacket before. Therefore, it was not difficult for him to have an answer prepared when he had anticipated the possibility of that happening.

"..... I guess. The possibility of that being true is low, but I do have to consider it as well. That is the reason why I am unwilling to say this to Monica till now."

Phew— she heaved a sigh through her lips.

"I am well aware of the fact that I am a typical People of Nell. Everyone says we are a tribe with a very strong sense of wariness, but on the other hand, we will never hold back in our assistance towards those whom we trust. That applies to how I treat Monica as well. Since she is my friend, I want to do things for her that will make her happy."

With her attention focused on what's before her, Sheltis could only see her side profile. She kept walking on without stopping.

"If..... and I mean if — if Monica knows that the supposedly dead dual sword wielder is still alive, she will be really happy. This may become a new source of motivation that pushes her on her path to become a regular guard, and she will probably become more energetic thanks to that..... However, I do not want her to be disappointed from a false alarm. I will be hurting Monica if you turn out to be someone else."

— So everything was for Monica's sake.

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

There was a slight change to Sheltis' initial impression of Kagura. He always thought she was doing all of that in order to satisfy her own curiosity.

In actual fact, Kagura's curiosity stems from her acting with the interests of her friend in mind.

"That's why I want to speak with you alone without the presence of Monica..... I'll just voice my conclusion: you are the dual sword wielder who is supposed to be dead three years ago."

That was right— that was the question which he and the *machine crystal* <Ilis> were trying their hardest to avoid, and was also the question that was hidden deep in Kagura's heart.

"You mean the incident of the guy falling into the *Garden of Corrupted Song* <Eden>?"

"That may be a falsified information which *Tenketsu Palace* <Sophia> released deliberately. No one has ever survived the fall into the *Garden of Corrupted Song* <Eden>, so we shall not include that in our discussion. My speculation is this — you were sent away on some secret orders, and has finally returned after a span of three years."

"I see....."

Sheltis gave a mumble. A strong breeze caused countless leaves to flutter in the air. He set his eyes set on the floating leaves and the sky.

..... No one has ever survived the fall into the *Garden of Corrupted Song* <Eden> huh.....

..... Can't blame her. It will be difficult for them to believe that anyway.

And it all boils down to this — no one will believe that a guy will survive a fall into the *Garden of Corrupted Song* <Eden>, much less the fact that he is carrying mateki in his body. Should the outsiders come to know of the truth, it will definitely cause a huge commotion that will shake *Tenketsu Palace* <Sophia>, and that is unacceptable. It's not only for his sake, but for Ymy's as well.

"Are you willing to give me your answer?"

"Sorry, but I am not the person whom you are talking about."

There was no hesitation in his answer.

There was no reason for him to since an alternate answer does not exists.

"Considering the size of the floating continent, there should be lots of people who's similar to me. I think it is just a coincidence that I am similar to that person who was in *Tenketsu Palace* <Sophia> three years ago."

"..... I see."

The girl heaved a deep sigh.

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

"Though I'm feeling sorry for Monica, it looks like I can't reveal this to her for now."

"Sorry for disappointing you."

"It's okay. I'll definitely get to the bottom of this some day."

And with that sentence.

It probably means that Kagura is still suspicious of him.

"That's fine with me, but I think it's about time we direct our attention away from this topic."

He stretched out his arms to signal an end to the discussion.

The entrance which they began their journey from had already blended itself into the horizon. Right now, what appeared before their eyes was a green ridge which extended outwards gently.

— The fourth sector of the western area of nature sector. They were approaching the heart of the sector.

"I have been focusing on the radar display of this little thing the whole time."

The mechanical sphere shimmered brilliant silver under the rays of the sun. It seemed like the screen in front of Kagura was displaying the results of the search.

"I've obtained a pretty interesting reading. It's coming from behind

those hills."

She pointed towards the green ridges located diagonally to their left. Meaning, it was located at a sheltered area past the hills that were granting them the best vantage point.

"Can you make out what that is?"

"There is no movement from the target. It is probably an object or something."

..... An object? In the dead middle of the plains?

If they are talking about the nature park located near the living sector, it is possible for that to be a monument or something. However, they were in the territory of the nature sector. It is strange for a man-made object to be erected in the middle of the untouched plains.

"Strange. I don't remember the installation of any weather-monitoring devices or something like that around here."

"In any case, let's go and take a look."

He hastened his pace, leading the bewildered Kagura. The ground was covered with grass which looked like a green carpet. They could feel the softness on the sole of their feet with each passing step.

"This is a really relaxing place. The wind is very comfortable as well."

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

"..... Do you really think so?"

"Eh?"

Kagura reached the peak of the hill a little later. Sheltis then silently pointed in the direction before him.

An object.

A transparent container was erected at about ten meters beneath the hill. It was filled with a blue liquid, with countless air bubbles which rose up from the bottom of the container.

A dark purple beast was immersed within the liquid.

The water tank with a Yuugenshu encased within it was erected in solitude before them.

"Wha.....! What in the world is that....."

The girl beside him said with a trembling voice.

"— It's exactly the same."

Sheltis held his breath in silence as he stared at the object which was obviously out-of-place with its surrounding.

He saw the same thing back when he was at *Floating Archipelagos* <Lagoon> with Monica. The water tank of that research facility was already destroyed by the Yuugenshu. If so, was the water tank before them a different one?

"Step back, Kagura. That Yuugenshu is real."

His hands reached out to the twin swords that were secured to his belt. Regardless of who did it and for whatever purpose, this thing cannot be allowed to exist on the floating continent.

"Sheltis, what are you talking about..... It will be too dangerous if that is the real Yuugenshu!"

"And it will be even more so when it awakens. Since it is still in its slumber—"

Just then, he took a look at the shadow at his feet.

It was the shadow of him and Kagura. Besides that, there was another small black dot which appeared on the ground.

..... A shadow? Of what?

Just as he was focusing on the areas around his foot, the small black dot expanded slowly — it turned large enough to swallow the shadows of both of them.

A chill shot up his spine.

"Get down!"

"Eh..... K-Kyaaa!"

Without waiting for her answer, Sheltis hugged Kagura and leapt towards the side.

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

And at the same time.

Something struck the hill which the two of them was standing on earlier, destroying everything.

There was a deafening blast and a shockwave from what looked like a large-scale explosion — with the epicenter of the two occurring at the hill which they were on.

Both of them spread outwards in all directions.

"..... Ugh!"

Their bodies were thrown upwards thanks to the shockwave created by the blast of impact. As they were flung high up into the air, Shetlis hugged Kagura and barely managed to stabilize his body's position in mid-air. While shielding Kagura with his left arm, he used his right to push against the ground and rolled against it in order to dissipate the impact.

"Where's the hill?"

Kagura was rooted on the ground speechlessly.

The reddish-brown ground suffered from a brutal blast. The hill which the two of them was standing on earlier had disappeared, replaced by a giant crater in its place.

"..... Nothing can stand before my 'Golden Hexahedral' and emerge victorious."

A deep voice came from the bottom of the crater.

Szzzz..... szz..... sszzz.....

A tall man was climbing up the reddish-brown slope.

It was a strange sight. His whole body was wrapped up in a faded dirt-yellow robe — and that included his fingers which were kept in the sleeves. Mechanical rings bound the robe in all places. They could clearly see his neck, shoulder, elbow and wrists being constricted tightly by the rings.

— This person here.....

All he did was to look at the man, and Sheltis was breathless from the intimidation.

His instincts told him right away that the man is the culprit, and at the same time..... he was an unfathomable monster.

"My name's Maha. The 'Golden Maha'."

His name was announced from deep within his robe as though he was chanting a curse. That marked the start of the battle.

"Proceeding with the intervention. Beginning the elimination of the witnesses....."

The fourth sector of the western area of nature sector.

It was only one hour till the rendezvous of Maha and Igun-I.

Final Chapter

Zero — He who shatters the Gold —

{1}

"This is the person..... who defeated all the regular guards.....?"

The girl in her mechanical helmet was the first to shout.

"W-Who are you!? We are the official members from *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*>!"

"....."

Maha. The man who called himself by that name did not reply.

All he did was to climb up the crater one step at a time.

"D-Did you hear what I had said? What are your motives—"

"It's pointless."

Sheltis interrupted her. He pulled out the twin swords from the sheaths behind him and held them in reverse grips.

"He has no intention of communicating with us."

There was a strong animosity in the pressure emitted from Maha's body. They were looking at the person who downed the squads from *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*> one after another, so there was little chance of him listening to them. The sneak attack from earlier proved just that.

..... Earlier, that guy just referred us as witnesses.

There's the mysterious water tank with a Yuugenshu in it. That man must be the guardian of the tank, and he will eliminate all who gets close to it.

"Kagura."

Sheltis lowered his voice to barely within Kagura's auditory range.

"I'll be moving in. Stay away from me."

"Eh? But....."

"Don't worry."

With that said, Sheltis refocused his sight on Maha.

— I've said this person is a puppeteer.

They are casters who direct their shinryoku into objects to control them — the amount and type of objects controlled will depend on the capabilities of the caster. It would be tough for Sheltis should

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

Maha increase the distance between the two of them.

— If that's the case, I'll just have to strike before he can use his 'puppets'!

A whirlwind was created from his leap.

"Ta". Sheltis stomped his foot hard against the ground and created an afterimage. With the speed of his feet that was fast enough to stir up a whirlwind, he pressed his body as low as he could and dashed towards the crater.

The surroundings became a blur due to his high speed. He shortened the distance between himself and Maha in a blink of an eye and raised his brilliantly shining sword against the rays of the sun—

Just then.

"I, define the universe."

Sheltis could see the lips of the robed man curving upwards.

"Za..... da..... dadadara..... ka....."

Strange sounds were coming out from the man's mouth.

..... What's that?

Maha was right before him. At the moment when the battle would be decided with a swing of his sword — an ominous chill spread

throughout his body.

"Zazakazada..... da..... zakarakara.....
zadadadazakakakazadazakazada..... rada.....
rakazazakakadada..... za..... zaza..... karakara.....
zadadadada....."

Psh.

Objects sprang out from the slope of the crater.

Golden stakes.

Countless stakes shot up from beneath the ground with the speed of bullets, and the sharp ends of the stakes stabbed towards him like the tips of a spear. Hundreds of stakes appeared.

— All of them are his puppets!? What an incredible amount. Is it really possible for a person to control all of them?

"Ugh!"

A flash.

As the wide area attack approached, Sheltis swung the swords in his hands. He sliced, wrecked and severed the sharp tips of the stakes that were flying towards him one at a time before parrying them all away.

The fallen stakes stirred up a cloud of dust before losing their golden luster and turning into soil.

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

..... They're not made of gold? Then why are stakes made of soil shimmering with a golden luster?

"Define. The dream of a world covered in roots."

As Maha said that in a low voice, the ground beneath his feet began to rumble.

Sha. His ankle was ensnared by something. Sheltis moved his sight in that direction.

"..... Roots?"

His right ankle was ensnared by a dull, cypress-colored root. The root, thicker than a human's arm, was bound around his ankle in a spiral.

"Define."

A certain object clawed out from the ground next to Maha's feet.

Two lion statues with flowing manes.

"Replicated with soil. Color - 'deep red'; nature - 'gallant'; shape - 'lion'. Two shall appear before me. Defined to eliminate the enemy before me."

The two large lions were as tall as humans were.

They were originally just lion statues made of soil. However, their eyes gave off a fiery glow as the color of their body turned ruby

red.

"..... Could it be?"

After he saw what happened before him, Sheltis realized what the Maha's spell was.

The two lions roared beside Maha. They were the mystical beasts of the floating continent that were rarely seen by anyone.

"Sheltis!"

"Don't come here!"

He stopped Kagura from sprinting over. Next, he chopped away the roots that were binding his ankle.

— Kagura would be attacked if she make any sudden movements.

The two lions were baring their teeth in hostility. As the two lions closed in on him from both sides, Sheltis moved in and closed the distance between them.



He jumped upwards and dodged the razor-sharp claws above him. Next, he blocked the paws of the other lion with the sword on his left side.

"Haa!"

While enduring the burning pain from his left shoulder-blade, he slammed the sword in his right hand towards the jaw of a lion.

The beast gave a painful cry. It then turned into sand and rained onto the ground below..... Where was the other one?

As he lifted his head, he could hear the screams of the young girl from afar.

"Kagura!"

He sprinted at subsonic speed, leaving the winds behind him.

With its sight locked onto the defenseless girl who was rooted to the ground, the lion was about to mercilessly pounce on her. Sheltis tossed the sword in his right hand. The blade grazed past the mane of the lion, forcing it to stop in its tracks momentarily.

Taking advantage of the brief window of opportunity, Sheltis slashed the back of the mystical beast with the sword in his left hand.

"Are you alright?"

"Y-Yup....."

The stone ceiling above their head came crashing down like a tidal wave. The boulders were sizes of adult males despite the fact that they were split into fragments of the original. The sheer amount of rocks was unfathomable.

"We'll be squashed!"

"Hang on tight!"

As he grabbed the shrieking Kagura, Sheltis began to leap through the minute spaces between the boulders.

Swiping aside the unavoidable sharp fragments with his blades, Sheltis jumped onto the slanted surface of a giant boulder that was falling downwards. He dashed to the peak of the boulder before jumping towards another incoming one. Sheltis made his way to the top of the cage with Kagura in his arms by climbing up the boulders and squeezing through the minute spaces.

"..... Incredible. That is some crazy athletic ability."

Exclaimed the girl who he was carrying on his left shoulder. Sheltis chose to ignore her statement.

— We're out.

After breaking free from the collapsing cage, the two of them landed on the peak of the leftover boulders. Sheltis glared downwards at the robed man who was some distance away from him.

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

..... I'sa was right.

Despite the fact that they were both puppeteers, their 'object' controlling abilities were miles apart. Maha could accurately control such heavy boulders to trap his opponents; moreover, his spell allowed him to destroy the boulders as he wished. He was probably much stronger than any other shinryoku-practitioners Sheltis had ever seen in *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*>.

..... But something felt off.

The main focus of Maha's art was not the control of the objects. Instead, it on was what happened before that—

"Define."

A large bird statue appeared besides Maha.

The stone statue emitted a golden glow due to the shinryoku within it. It underwent gradual changes as Maha defined it in detail.

"Replicated with organic matter extracted from the grounds. Color - 'black'; nature - 'incensed'; shape - 'bird'. Appear before me with fire in your body. Defined to get within range of the enemies before me and destroy them."

After the formation of its sharp beak and claws, the strange-looking pitch black bird flapped its powerful wings.

Heeding the instructions of Maha, it flew slowly towards the boulder that they were standing on. The slow-moving actions were

not something replicable by the birds of nature — its speed was no faster than that of a walking man.

..... Strange.

With its huge size and slow speed, it was practically begging to be destroyed.

"Wait!"

"Eh?"

Before he knew it, Kagura grabbed tightly his left sleeve.

"Organic matter extracted from the ground..... fire within its body?"

The girl was mumbling what Maha had chanted earlier. She kept repeating those words while ignoring the giant bird which was closing in on them.

"Incense..... fire within its body..... organic..... extracted..... which means..... organic compounds?"

She suddenly lifted her head as though she was electrocuted.

"Sheltis, that's not a bird. It's a bomb that's shaped like one!"

"..... A bomb?"

"Nitroglycerin! That bird itself is a huge explosive chemical compound! You can't strike it down or the vibrations will set off an

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

inferno and a shock wave!"

"What should I do then?"

"You should—"

Her yell came too late.

Sheltis made his move long before Kagura could finish her sentence. The pitch black bird slammed itself into the boulder beneath their feet. And then—

Their sights were dyed white.

An inferno and a shock wave spread outwards at supersonic speeds, and engulfed and swept aside everything in their paths.

The boulder that the young girl and man were standing on earlier was reduced to small rocks. The plains was razed by the inferno, and turned into scorched land.

All that was left was the thick black fumes emitted from the ground.

"....."

As the heatwaves swept through the lands, the motionless Maha focused his attention onto the center of the explosion. The vision turned clearer as the wind blew away the thick smoke.

The charred land was razed mercilessly by the inferno.

Boulders were shattered into pieces due to the shockwave from the explosion.

However, the two of them were not seen at the center of the blast.

"..... They're determined to have escaped,"

Said Maha quietly before turning his body away.

"..... Forty-seven minutes remaining."

With his head lifted upwards in the direction of the water tank, Maha stopped moving once again.

* * *

— He probably will not find us here.

Sheltis heaved a sigh of relief as he looked towards the robed silhouette below him.

"Are you alright?"

"..... Y-Yes."

The girl in close proximity to Sheltis replied softly.

Countless number of fissures were created on the ground, and they were hiding in one of them. The cage made of huge boulders had caused a great disturbance in the ground, which was then compounded by the huge explosion in the end. These spells from Maha resulted in huge fissures on the ground. Maha probably did

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

not expect them to be hiding in these fissures, and it seemed like he did not deploy any searching spells to locate them either.

"..... Unbelievable. Is this the arts of a human being?"

Kagura bit onto her pale lips tightly.

"The man can control enough matter to cause disturbances in the ground itself. A typical puppeteer can only control up to a few hundred kilograms of mass. However, those boulders had a mass of at least ten tonnes. That's just atrocious....."

"That's not the problem."

"..... Are you referring to the red lions or that strange-looking bird instead?"

He nodded in silence.

Those were originally made of soil, but they became mobile after receiving shinryoku from Maha. The red lions attacked with agile movements that were on par with that of real ones, while the bird was granted the ability to fly towards its target and self-destruct.

"That guy said this: 'I, define the universe'. Do you remember that?"

"Are you saying that the guy's shinryoku arts allows him to create and control anything? That's impossible. Just like what Monica always says, shinryoku itself is not an omnipotent power. That is why grueling training are necessary."

"I know that. But....."

Those red lions and the strange-looking bird, together with how he manipulated the boulders from within the ground — they were all real. The arts of that man is undoubtedly one of the most shocking he has ever witnessed up till now.

"What I am more interested in is that strange chant."

"You mean his 'define' thingy? He said things like nature, colors and such."

"No. What's most bizarre is that 'rakazazakakada' thing which he said earlier — those lines sounded like the flapping wings of an insect."

Tok — the girl tapped onto her visor with her finger.

"Did you notice this? That chant was made up of only 'ra', 'ka', 'za' and 'da'. The frequency of 'ra' used was significantly lesser than that of 'ka', 'za' and 'da'. There must be some sort of rules to that chant..... a huge secret hidden behind it."

She remembered it all in such a short period of time?

"I did mention that this little thing here is my pride, did I not? It had recorded down everything earlier,"

Said Kagura as she hugged onto the *machine pearl* <Machina>.

"The way I look at it..... the chants made up of those

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

four syllables form the main body of the spell. The 'define' part is probably just the secondary part to the spell or something?"

"I hold the same opinion as well. The four-syllables chant is like the loading of bullets, while the firing mechanism is the 'define' part that forms the second phase of the spell. However..... even if our hypothesis are right, it will be pointless if we can't decipher that four-syllables chant."

"Can you do that?"

"If I have the luxury of time, I am confident of doing it. However, I can't do it here."

And why's that?

The young girl shook her head before he could even ask.

"I cannot guarantee the accuracy of my decipherment if I am given only a short period of time. A wrong analysis would result in wrong instructions which would lead to our annihilation — the risks are far too high. Moreover, he would definitely try to stop me if he realized what I am doing. I'll be in a defenseless state during the deciphering process, so my life will be exposed to danger during that time."

"..... I'll take care of that."

"Are you planning to buy time for me by becoming the bait? Sorry, I do not think you can protect me from that scary arts of his."

That was an incredibly blunt declaration.

And at the same time, it showed her distrust towards him.

"I've said this many times already — I do not trust you. On paper, you may be asking me to decipher the contents while you act as the bait. However, there is the chance of you running away in times of danger and leaving me behind..... Laugh at me if you want, but that's what I am most afraid of."

The young girl's shoulders trembled as she hugged onto her *machine pearl* <Machina>.

She imagined the scene of Sheltis abandoning her as she faced Maha alone; the images of her body collapsing onto the ground with injuries all over her body.

"..... I see."

Kagura's answer might have been different if it was Monica instead.

Her answer might have been different if the person asking her was someone whom she could entrust herself to.

That was the decisive gap between them —
a unbridgeable distance between him and Kagura caused by the lack of trust.

"Thankfully, our opponent has not realized our hiding place for now. We should be able to escape given the right opportunity. I should be able to focus on deciphering his chants when we returned back to *Tenketsu Palace* <Sophia>, and we can even ask for

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

reinforcements. We can then decide if we should revamp the team or....."

"Mmm."

"So you got it? Well then—"

"Let's split up from here. I'll keep him busy. Kagura, you shall head back to *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*>."

"..... Eh?"

"You said there will be an opportunity for us to escape, but Maha's not someone who will let us go that easily."

Sheltis smiled as he prodded at the mechanical helmet on Kagura's head. The bewildered expression on the girl's face was cute in a childish way.

"It's not your fault that I cannot gain your trust. It is very clear that the problem lies with me. I'm sorry, but I can't tell you the truth."

"U-Urm..... Sheltis..... What are you planning to do?"

"I'll be staying back to fight against Maha. He'll have to give his full attention to me, and that will allow Kagura to escape."

"A-Are you an idiot!?"

"I'm not idiot, yeah? I've originally planned to take on him alone

anyway."

"Those are the words of an idiot! You're facing someone who's beyond the realms of our understanding..... Moreover, aren't you instructed to rest? The doctors even banned you from undergoing any training, so how long do you think that body of yours will last?"

"..... It'll last for a while more."

He pressed gingerly onto the injury at the back of his head.

Pa — a cracking sound reverberated in his head, and a searing pain shot down from his head to his neck to his spine.

He had no idea how much longer he will last, but it should not be long. That's what his body told him.

It will be all over if the injury opens up.

..... Can I defeat that man while protecting my injury at the same time?

..... No, I have to win.

"I'm curious about the implication behind the 'forty-seven minutes remaining' said by that man."

Even as he was eliminating his enemies, Maha did not once step away from the water tank and the Yuugenshu that was encased within it. What is his motives? Somehow..... the ominous feeling inside him was getting stronger and stronger.

He has to stop Maha now. It will be too late if they return to

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

Tenketsu Palace <*Sophia*> for reinforcements.

"You mean, there will be changes to the Yuugenshu that's within the tank?"

"That's highly possible — in the worst case scenario, his ally will be here as well."

"..... What do you mean by that?"

"If the forty-seven minutes refers to a time-limit, then someone will be here to meet him when the time is over. In this case, there must be someone to check if Maha has managed to protect the water tank successfully."

"So that man..... has an ally?"

"Definitely."

As a shinryoku-practitioner, the abilities of that man is incredible — however, it is highly unlikely for that man to be a researcher like Kagura is. The water tank and its imprisoned content should be made by someone else.

"H-Hold on a second. If that monster has an ally..... and if that ally shows up here, there is no way you can take on them both."

"Right? That is why I have to take him down while he is still alone."

The abilities of that robed man was way beyond his gauge. Sheltis had no confidence of surviving if someone else is to appear as well.

"..... Why?"

The girl suddenly raised her lowered head.

"Why are you forcing yourself?"

There was an incredible innocence in the voice of the young girl.

"Isn't that so? All those things we discussed earlier were nothing more than just conjectures. But..... why are you staying back because of these unproven conjectures? A sense of justice? Your vanity? Your moral values? Or is it simply because you're a sore loser? I cannot comprehend why you chose to fight against that monster."

There was nothing clean or dirty about that question of hers.

It was nothing more than a purest form of doubt — one that is formed after filtering all the impurities.

"There's a promised land."

The peak of the tower; the place where Ymy was waiting.

"I have to go to that place, because someone is waiting for me."

"I-If that's the case, then why—"

As he took the gaze of Kagura head on, Sheltis continued—

"..... I do not want to disappoint her. She was waiting for me all

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

these while despite her being in a place that's out of my reach even as the years flashed by..... That's why I can't just aim to reach her. I have to take a path that she can be genuinely happy and proud of."

The path of absolute conviction will definitely lead him to the place where she is waiting for him.

He has no intention of turning away.

"I saw I'sa and Jin before coming here."

"I heard. They are the ones whom we met yesterday, yes? The dual gunner named Jin suffered heavy injuries from protecting the girl named I'sa."

"She cried."

"..... Eh?"

The female puppeteer cried at the hospital. She lamented on the fact that she could do nothing when Jin collapsed before her; she cried about how weak she was.

And yet, she planned to take on Maha alone despite her tears.

Their situations overlapped with each other.

I'sa wanted to take on Maha in revenge for the dual gunner, her partner. Despite being alone, she insisted on fulfilling her responsibilities as a guard—

As for Ymy, she kept waiting for Sheltis who had fallen into the *Garden of Corrupted Song <Eden>*. She did not pick her Sennenshi which should have been necessary, nor was she assigned any guards. However, Ymy continued to give her all as a Priestess. The situations of the two different girls were similar in a sense.

"I do not wish to disappoint her..... because I can understand her feelings very well."

"B-but, you are not related to I'sa in any way! Why are you doing all these just because you understand her feelings?"

"Because we are all from the same tower. That's a good enough reason for me, isn't it?"

Upon hearing that line from Sheltis.

Kagura swallowed the words she was about to say and lowered her head for a long while.

"..... You are the exact opposite from me."

Her voice was close to tears.

"The only people who I trust are those whom I believe in, but you are willing to trust those who believes in you....."

It was as though Kagura was murmuring to herself.

"Sheltis..... if..... and I mean if..... if I swear now that I'll assist you, will you believe in me as well?"

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

"No."

Before Kagura could answer.

Sheltis put on a mischievous smile.

"There is no need for you to do that. I've always believed in you, Kagura. Didn't you do your best in helping me to analysis the appearance of the Yuugenshu when I asked you to?"

"!! W-Wait! Wait a second—"

"Alright, make sure you escape from here."

Sheltis flashed a brief wink before picking up his dual swords once more.

Maha looked upwards into the direction of the water tank despite the fact that his eyes were obscured by the hood of his robe.

In the water tank lies the Yuugenshu that was captured by Igun-I. They had specially moved it here so that they can perform the 'resonating experiment' at the faraway *Floating Archipelagos* <Lagoon>.

"....."

How boring, Maha thought to himself.

His job was to eliminate all who came close to the water tank. It has been seventy-one hours since the mission had proceeded, and there was only an hour left before he completes his task. However, was there a need to activate him for this job?

He did not meet anyone who was worthy enough to be his opponent; a strong opponent who was on the same level as he is, someone who can force him to activate the true powers of the 'Golden Hexahedral'

.

And so, Maha thought,

I gained nothing from this task.

"....."

Then again, there was that dual sword wielder.

The one who fought him and managed to escape from his arts despite the fact that he was protecting a girl at the same time. If it's that dual sword wielder—

"....."

Maha turned his body around when he heard the footsteps.

"— Let us begin."

The two blades were giving off a violet glow in the rays of the sun.

There was no sneak attacks or any concrete plans. All the young

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

man did was to walk slowly towards Maha one step at a time.

Sheltis Magna Yehle stood right before him.

"....."

Maha flashed a hidden smile beneath his hood.

Right, that should be the way. Or else it will be pointless for me to be at this place.

"Za..... da..... dadadara..... ka....."

The creation and control of the art, 'Golden Hexahedral'.

"Zazakazada..... da..... zakarakara.....
zadadadazakakakazadazakazada..... rada.....
rakazazakakadada..... za..... zaza..... karakara.....
zadadadada....."

It was all so that he could defeat the dual sword wielder in front of him.

"Why are men such egoistic creatures?"

Back in the fissure, Kagura hugged the *machine pearl* <Machina> and shut her eyes.

"How can he possibly win against that Maha guy by himself? That

shinryoku-practitioner is way beyond the realms of our understanding."

The 'Golden Hexahedral' was an all-powerful art. There must be some sort of secrets behind it, and it is likely to be hidden in the semantics of that chant.

"It will be impossible to win without the cracking of that chant..... I should have told him that already."

There is no way he can defeat Maha if he did not decipher its secrets.

If that is the case— what if he knew the secrets behind it?

If someone is able to crack the chants of Maha, will Sheltis be able to win?

"I-Impossible! That will not happen! It is impossible..... for that to happen."

She tried her hardest to reject the idea from her mind.

That is definitely impossible. I am the only one around who can do that. There is no way the chants will be cracked if I do not assist him.

That's right..... that will be the case..... if I do not believe he stands a chance in defeating Maha.

"How could he possibly win with those injuries on him....."

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

It's not just the injury on his head. Back then that strange-looking bird exploded—

The inferno and shockwaves which surpassed the speed of sound. Both of them was engulfed in an explosion which shattered tonnes of rocks easily. Back then—

"..... If he did not protect me....."

I could not escape in time. Sheltis was the one who shielded me with his back and brought me to this fissure.

His back suffered from burns caused by the explosion.

"..... Even though he already knew how timid I am....."

Those burns which stretched from your neck to your back — was it all from protecting me?

..... I cannot bring myself to ask him that question. I was afraid he will give me the answer I expected from him.

"For a creature as timid as I am....."

What are these feelings inside of me?

Why am I still here instead of running away from this place?

"..... Monica..... I want to be like you too....."

Her trembling did not stop.

She continued to hug the *machine pearl* <*Machina*> tightly. And at the deepest areas inside her—

"Monica..... please..... grant me courage."

Should I abandon everything? Not at all.

Now is the time for me to resolve myself.

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

{2}

"Define. Chant the 'forest' of the world."

Giant roots sprung from the ground as well as from the fallen leaves and petals on the ground.

Zazaa..... aa.....

A giant patch of 'green' rose upwards as though it were trying to block off the rays of the sun. Riding on the wind, it came sweeping towards Sheltis. If he were to be engulfed by that, it would probably be the same as jumping into a whirlpool in the sea — his consciousness would be taken away.

"..... If only Leon were around."

That great-sword wielder could part waterfalls with his sword. If so, it would definitely be easy for him to sweep this green waterfall apart in one strike.

— There was no way that could be stopped by two swords.

He secured the twin swords in the holster at his back and focused his gaze on the green waterfall in the air. Just as the green swirl was about to reach him...

— *thud*.

Acceleration. Sheltis moved just before the roots and tendrils came

into contact with his jacket.

He repeatedly dodged the tsunami of petals which brushed by his side. Countless after-images were formed as he alternated between acceleration and deceleration constantly.

At an extreme speed undetectable by the eyes of a typical human, Sheltis appeared before Maha in a flash.

"Define."

However, the robed caster began to construct yet another spell.

"Replicated with poison extracted from the ground. Color - 'white'; nature - 'timid'; shape - 'snake'. Fangs with deadly poison, ten of them shall appear. Defined to seal the enemy before me with poison."

Snaked-shaped clay figures began to appear around the feet of Maha, transforming under the influence of the golden shinryoku. Multiple lifelike poisonous white snakes appeared, and barred their poisoned fangs towards Sheltis.

"..... Don't get in my way!"

Sheltis dodged past the snakes that were attacking him from all directions. He then drew his swords and dashed straight towards Maha.

— Five meters left.

Just as he broke past the army of snakes, the tall man suddenly

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

stopped moving.

"Define."

Gold shinryoku enveloped the whole of Maha's body.

The glow of the advent-type spells that conjure matter was glowing way brighter than ever before.

"Replicated with the ores beneath the ground."

The earth split.

Giant ores rose up from within the fissures. The ores with the masses of hills blocked Sheltis' path towards Maha.

"Color - 'brown'; nature - 'savage'; shape - 'dragon'. Attention to details is unnecessary. Large sized body and fangs, unparalleled razor-sharp claws. One shall appear. Defined to crush all enemies."

The ores began to pulsate as the golden shinryoku shrouded them.

Ten meters long. Its giant body was encased with basalt-like black scales.

The inverted triangular-shaped head was akin to that of a lizard, and two horns extended from the back of its head. The wings on its back was degenerated, but in exchange it was blessed with the evolution of the four thick and muscular limbs, each of which was larger than an adult human—

"Earth dragon..... he's got that too!?"

The largest creature on the floating continent — one of the species of dragons. Its four limbs were developed specially for moving on the ground, and it also had a long tail. They were viewed as one of the most violent species among the dragons.

The earth dragon gave a roar. But just as Sheltis lifted his sword to face the overwhelming creature before him.....

Severe pain.

"..... Ugh.....? Ka....."

An indescribable dull pain shot up from his spine to the back of his head.

..... Shit, at a time like this!?

He increased his grip so as not to drop his swords.

..... Just hang on. Just a while longer will do.

..... Just a while more.

His opponent was not endowed with unlimited physical strength either — that earth dragon was the proof of that. Maha must be in a state of exhaustion from casting such a large-scaled spell within a short amount of time.

— If I can down this dragon!

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

The ground rumbled as the earth dragon pounced towards him. Sheltis leaped away from the giant limb which came crashing down from above him. He then twisted his body to dodge the tail that swept past him.

His body reached its limit after avoiding all that.

Sheltis collapsed onto the ground as he could no longer steady his body.

..... My body..... can no longer move?

He was at his limit. It took him a great deal of effort just to fend away the searing pain that could rob him of his consciousness at any moment.

"Define."

Maha's voice rang through the plains.

"Replicated using clay—....."

His chanting was interrupted by a gunshot.

It felt like time was brought to a standstill. Maha and the earth dragon stopped moving.

"....."

Maha silently turned his body towards the source of the sound. Sheltis' eyes widened.

"W-What are you doing there lying on the ground!? To think you were acting all cool just a while ago!"

The young girl aimed her stun-gun at Maha.

Her hands and lips trembled slightly — but she still stood firmly.

"Kagura? Why....."

"Why didn't I escape? Obviously because I am here to support the undependable you!"

With that said, she did something incomprehensible.

She tossed away the stun-gun, her only weapon, and hugged the *machine pearl* <*Machina*> after kneeling on the ground. It was painfully obvious that she was defenseless.

"Just hold on for another fifty seconds."

".....W-What's going on?"

"Do I even have to explain? I'll analyze Maha's chants for you. That's right, I'll decipher everything!"

The silver *machine pearl* <*Machina*> gave off a pale greenish glow.

"I believe that you will protect me."

Despite her cold and calm tone, it was a display of her unwavering faith in him.

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

That was her answer.

"Crush them."

The earth dragon began to move after receiving the command from Maha.

Its sight was locked onto the girl who was sitting silently with the *machine pearl* <Machina> in her chest.

— Kagura did not move an inch.

There was no way she could miss the rumbling of the ground, or remained unshaken from the roars of the earth dragon. However, all she did was to stare at the computer and focused all her attention on her analysis.

Just because she believed that there was someone who will protect her.

"..... Alright."

Sheltis stabbed the sword into the ground and used it to lift his body upwards.

Fifty seconds. That was the amount of time she entrusted herself to him.

..... I'll accept your request.

As he gritted his teeth to endure the searing pain, he diverted energy into his legs.

He dashed off and began to accelerate. After catching up to the earth dragon that pounced towards Kagura, he aimed at the four limbs and swung his swords.

Forty seconds left.

"—— Grrrrr!"

The enraged earth dragon turned its body towards him.

It stomped its injured limbs on the ground and lifted its tail high up. And at that moment, Sheltis jumped upwards to reach a height that was higher than anyone else.

After a wobbly landing onto the tail of the dragon, he ran towards its back. He then leaped past the deformed wings and took aim at its head.

Thirty seconds left.

Sensing danger, the dragon twisted its head and attacked with its jaws opened wide. As he slithered through the sharp sword-like fangs, Sheltis swung his swords towards the head of the dragon.

A sharp pain almost robbed him of his consciousness.

"..... Hsss....."

The earth dragon released a feeble hiss before its death and

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

thrashed violently. Sheltis was flung off of its body, and landed hard on his back on the ground. Along from the pain from the impact, a red fluid flowed past his cheeks. The injury on his head had reopened.

—What's this..... nauseous feeling!?

The pain from his head was more than what he could handle, and turned into an intense bout of dizziness and nauseousness.

"Define."

Maha moved his gaze away from Sheltis who had collapsed knee-first onto the ground and turned towards Kagura.

"The sky-piercing Mother Earth. Fire at her with a thousand spears."

The vast grounds began to release a gold shimmer upon receiving the golden shinryoku.

badump..... ba..... badump..... badump..... dum.....

The land was pulsating. What looked like bamboos shot up from the ground with incredible density. However, those objects were much sharper and more malicious than bamboos—

"..... Spears?"

Golden clay spears. That was the initial spell used by Maha, but it was obviously much stronger than before. Countless spears

appeared from the ground..... the sheer number and scale of the spell was not comparable to that of earlier.

A thousand. If Maha said so, then there must be many more spears than that.

"Kagura!"

All of them were aimed towards the young girl sitting on the ground.

She only had the *machine pearl* <*Machina*> in her arms - there was no way she could defend herself.

"Escape....."

Escape now— but Sheltis could not finish his sentence.

Kagura did not notice that she was surrounded by a thousand spears.

She remained on the ground, focusing her attention only on the screen of the *machine pearl* <*Machina*>.

She could neither see spears nor feel the trembling of the ground. Her consciousness was cut off and contained within her body and her world where she processed the information.

"I believe that you will protect me."

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

She had really meant that.

"..... Damn."

As he stared at the back of the young girl, Sheltis actually flashed a bitter smile.

..... Even though you asked me not to be reckless.

..... Compared to me, aren't you the more reckless one?

The thousand spears continued to protrude from the ground.

It would take a miracle to save Kagura should those spears be fired at the speeds of bullets. His could not move his body at will due to the numbness spreading throughout his body as well as the pain and nauseousness. Actually, it would have made no difference even if he could have moved his body freely. It was nigh impossible for anyone to save a girl from thousands of spears and come out unscathed.

..... That's absolutely..... impossible.....

..... Is that really true.....

..... If there is a way out..... it would be to nullify the shinryoku.

..... And that method.....

"..... It exists."

He propped his wobbly body off the ground with the aid of his swords, before keeping them in the holster at his back again.

— The method does exist.

The forbidden curse. The pulse that floods the *Garden of Corrupted Song* <Eden>. A negative tone which curses and corrodes everything on the floating continent.

Despite the fact that it was a taboo power, if the situation calls for it.....

"Fire."

Maha proclaimed.

And at the same time, thousand of spears shot toward Kagura.

Kagura, who was still hugging onto her *machine pearl* <Machina>, remained motionless. The fastest spear was aimed towards the machine helmet of the defenceless girl. And then—

..... Ka..... rara.....

Bullseye. The machine helmet dropped onto the ground.

Dark green hair and round black eyes, and the horizontally extended ears unique to the People of Nell. The girl's face was revealed after the loss of her protective gear. The other spears approached her from all directions—

Mateki <melody> — "Seventh True Rhythm <Eden

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

Code> Symphony of the Third Mirror Boundary"

neoles xin cia tis kyel corn.

<I henceforth declare the end of the dream>

Oo/ X =E lis, char copha noi I. ende hypes eden ele xeph.

*<The song permeating through the world, awakening the
slumbering paradise>*

The thousands of spears stopped in their tracks.

ualen, yahe, char, kamyu

<Prayers, words, songs, memories>

paravel ment deus Ahw xeph quo ferm fel, quo xeph fern kyel

*<Where did the lost fragments awaken, and where did they
slumber>*

A gentle tone reverberated throughout the plains.

A dark purple glow began expanding outwards along with a faint
melody.

Sophit, viresel, ole, zarabel

<Thoughts, poetry, dreams, tears>

paravel shel deus Ahw mille quo ferm fel, quo eyen ferm kyel
<Where were the lost dreams born, and where did they return to>

Zaa..... aa.....

Upon coming into contact with the new light particles, the shinryoku that resulted in the ground glowing golden gradually disappeared.

"It has suppressed shinryoku? Could those deep purple light be—"

"..... Mateki?"

Both Maha and Kagura uttered of surprise.

Oo/ X =Elis, teo elmei hypne, ende phio in neightis cley.
<Liberating all from their slumber, I am the only one left on the land bathed in the rays of dawn>

ele tis-sek paravel char noi wi lef ilmei omia
<Constantly looking for the lost key before the giant door>

It was a mystifying scene.

After exposing to the mateki, the spears lost the shinryoku imbued in them and dropped back to the ground. Not just that, but the roots and the protruding bedrock — everything had returned back to its original state.

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

As though he was healing the scars of the earth.

Even though mateki should be something that pollutes and corrodes everything on the floating continent, it had actually restored balance to the world distorted by shinryoku.

— *Oe/ sia Eden, Ole ele, Selah pheno sia-s Arma Riris.*

<— *For the sake of all the forgotten ■■■*>

Fifty seconds. When the time which they agreed on was up—

The young man shrouded in purple mist shielded the girl who was hugging onto the *machine pearl* <*Machina*> behind him.

"..... Why are you carrying mateki despite being human?"

The person who broke the silence was Maha.

He gently flipped his robe as he stared at the mateki neutralizing his spells.

"Unconfirmed to be whether human or Yuugenshu — object deemed as highly dangerous."

After pulling a distance away from Sheltis, he began chanting once more.

"Za..... da..... dadadara..... ka....."

"2..... 1..... 111、 0....."

As Maha's chant began, so did the voice of Kagura.

"Zazakazada..... da..... zakarakara.....
zadadadazakakakazadazakazada..... rada.....
rakazazakakadada..... za..... zaza..... karakara.....
zadadadada..... zakazadakazadadadaraza.....
kakakazaradadadakaka..... zazazadaka....."

"22021..... 1..... 20、 0、21112000212021.....、
1..... 、 0220011..... 2..... 22..... 0、 0、 21111.....
202102111、 2..... 0002、 111100..... 22210....."

Everything was in sync — not a second off, nor were there any characters that had deviated.

Absolutely perfect. The young girl chanted it as though she was performing a piano legato.

"— Analysis complete. We'll win for sure."

"Eh?"

"There's not much time left, so I'll just tell you the important parts."

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

Kagura stood up slowly as she said that calmly.

"Maha's chants are based on a ternary numeral system."

"Sheltis, you should know that this is one of the systems of addition. We are currently using the decimal numeral system, where we will carry '1' for every ten digits. It is speculated that the reason for such a system is because humans have ten fingers. On the other hand, Maha's chants utilizes a ternary numeral system made up of 0, 1 and 2. 'Ka', 'da' and 'za' corresponds with the digits '0', '1' and '2' respectively. These digits are endowed with meaning, which are then used to construct complicated and powerful spells."

Kagura lifted her head slowly.

Her dark-green hair was of shoulder length, and her ears were extending horizontally outwards.

"Phew, it's been a while since I removed my mechanical helmet. The winds are really comfortable."

The young girl closed her eyes in pleasure as she stood against the wind.

"I originally thought 'ra' corresponds with '3', which will make it a quaternary numeral system. However, the frequency of '3' is way too small. Therefore, I deemed it to serve the same purpose as the comma ', '."

"But, why....."

"Why am I sure it's a ternary numeral system? The hint lies in the name of the art, the 'Golden Hexahedral'. I've no idea if you know this, but a regular hexahedral is cube. Well, I guess it will be easier to understand if you picture it as a dice. It represents the length, breadth and height — and all the independent elements will result in a three-dimensional body. It is similar to the concept of the ternary numeral system with the three independent elements of 0, 1 and 2. That is the reason why Maha's art is named 'Golden Hexahedral'."

Kagura opened her eyes once more.

With her shiny black eyes filled with an absolute confidence, Kagura pointed towards Maha.

"Those powerful spells of Maha are supported by these complicated chants. It may look invincible, but there are actually interesting weaknesses within his spells."

But— as she said that, Kagura looked in the direction of Sheltis.

"That is if you believe me."

"Sure. I'll do just that."

"..... You should at least hesitate a little in a situation like this."

Kagura covered her mouth and gave a brief giggle — she then sharpened her gaze.

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

"Your powers earlier were not shinryoku, but mateki. Am I right?"

"..... So you've seen everything."

"You are really an unfathomable person. Why is a human carrying mateki in his body? To be honest with, if I had seen that randomly by chance, I would have even thought that you're a Yuugenshu."

Said Kagura bluntly.

"You're an idiot for allowing someone untrustworthy like me to witness your strange powers. What are you planning to do should I tell others about it?"

"....."

That's right. He'll be exiled from *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*> once more should that happens. He will never be able to fulfil his promise to Ymy.

..... But if I do otherwise, I'll never be able to protect Kagura.

"I—"

"Don't put on such a sullen face."

That line from Kagura was way beyond what he had expected.

"Thank you for revealing such an important secret to me. You were forced to use your mateki in order to protect me, aren't you? You

showed me your mateki because you believed that I'll keep that a secret."

The People of Nell will reveal their smile only to those whom they trust — and a smile was appearing on the face of the young girl. The face revealed by the loss of the helmet.

"Ahh, this is great. You've finally answered my question. And with that, I am finally able to put the pride as a People of Nell on the line — in order to repay your trust..... I shall entrust my everything to you."

With her right hand still pointing towards Maha, she placed her left hand softly on her chest.

"I'll assist you from the side. The weakness to the spells of Maha..... it may be as difficult as putting a thread through the eye of a needle, but we'll definitely be able to shatter that Gold. You can do it, right?"

— There was no need for him to answer.

Sheltis stomped hard against the ground as the young girl finished her statement.

Accelerate. Accelerate. And accelerate.

As he accelerated to hyper speed, the scenery flew past him in a flash. Riding on the gale, he sprinted on the plains at speed that exceeded those of the winds — his eyes were fixed on the man who was waiting for him.

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

"Define."

Three soil statues appeared by Maha's side.

"Replicated with soil. Color - 'deep red'; nature - 'gallant'; shape - 'lion'. Three shall appear before me. Defined to eliminate the enemy before me."

Three red lions, deemed as the mystical beasts of the floating continent. They gave an earth-splitting roar before pouncing towards Sheltis with their powerful limbs.

"..... Ugh!"

The lions were agile and armed with sharp teeth and claws. It would be fine if he took on them one at a time, but fighting three of them together at once would not be easy. Just as he was about to change his direction and take on them separately—

"Stop moving!"

Far behind him, Kagura yelled,

"Objects defined as 'gallant' will only target moving objects! Just stop moving and wait till they pass by you!"

How could that be possible?

That is just..... despite the suspicion of him hearing her wrongly, Sheltis chose to believe in Kagura. He stopped quickly and stood still with the swords in his hand.

The lions appeared before him in a flash, and just as the claws were about to tear through his nose—

When they realized Sheltis was no longer moving, the three lions sprinted past Sheltis as though they were uninterested in a target that has lost his will to fight.

"It's fine now. Continue running!"

Upon receiving her instruction, Sheltis resumed his sprint.

"Listen to me as you run. Remember, what supports those powerful spells of Maha are the long chants as well as the hundreds and thousands of complicated definitions. But at the same time, that is their weakness as well. You can render a large majority of the spells useless once you've analysed the defined conditions. Maha's chants were made out of a ternary numeral system precisely because he does not want others to realize the conditions to his spells!"

"..... Damn you."

Maha's moan was proof of the accuracy of the young girl's hypothesis.

"Define — replicated with poison extracted from the ground. Color - 'white'; nature - 'timid'; shape - 'snake'. Fangs with deadly poison, thirty of them shall appear. Defined to seal the enemy before me with poison."

Poisonous white snakes appeared before Maha.

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

And as for his action towards the white army that was slithering towards him—

"Just run through them!"

And this time, he followed Kagura's instruction without hesitation.

"Contrary to what happened earlier, objects defined as 'timid' will only attack those who are rooted on the ground from their fear! Raise your swords and continue your dash!"

The snakes stopped moving as though they feared Sheltis. Sheltis ran past them without even giving them a second look.

— Got you!

Maha was within the range of his swords. There was no time for him to pull a distance away, neither does he have any form of defence.

"..... My arts is invincible."

Maha looked upwards towards the sky. He then spread opened his arms and swung them down hard.

The final spell used by the man who continued standing on where he was.

"Defining the 'Golden Hexahedral'."

Golden sand flowed from the sleeves as he swung his arms. No, the sand were much more brilliant than the sun. There was no doubt that they were gold itself.

"Replicated by gold. Color - 'golden'; nature - 'Maha'; shape - 'human'. Attention to details is unnecessary. Appear before me with gold within. Defined to manipulate the universe."

Another Maha appeared.

An avatar formed by gold. It was then when Sheltis finally understood. That was the true strength to Maha's arts — the profound and yet basic 'Golden Hexahedral'.

"Sheltis, this shall be my last assistance for you."

Kagura's voice rang behind him.

"I believe you. Shatter that Gold!"

The Golden Maha brandished both of his fists.

The fists came flying towards Sheltis at an incredible speed, carrying with it an incredible amount of power. Strangely, there was no fear within Sheltis.

"I'll reserve my thanks till you return back in triumph..... is that okay?"

"..... You'll definitely win and return safely, right?"

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

The girl puppeteer, and also—

The words conveyed from his childhood friend to him.

"— No, I am not the only person who yearns for the support of others.

I hope everyone can offer your support to the rest of the fellow members of the tower. Not just to me alone."

Shhh— the golden fists grazed past his cheeks and severed several strands of his hair..... and Sheltis could feel a warm sensation on his cheek. The shockwave from the punch scraped his face, resulting in blood flowing out from the injuries.

However, that did not stop the young man in his tracks.

"Remember this, *Gold* <*Maha*>!"

A slash of his sword. A glowing violet blade appeared all of the sudden to split the golden Maha statue apart. Next, Sheltis lifted his two swords high up in the air.

"Don't you ever think of harming my companions again!"

The dual swords of the young man—

VOLUME 03

Swept through the golden spellcaster, together with the Yuugenshu water tank behind him.

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

{3}

Peace returned to the plains once more.

"Yes, that's right. In regards to this incident, everything is fine now. I mean, we've just resolved it..... Yes, you're speaking to Kagura and Sheltis. Two cadet guards."

Kagura remained calm as she reported to the *Tenketsu Palace* <Sophia> Headquarters.

"What happened to the opponent? That is a difficult question. We did win, but I do not think that's the end of everything. Mmm, it's just like what I had reported earlier. Yes. We'll submit a detailed report when we return— Yes. That is all."

Phew— Kagura sighed as she disconnected the call.

"It was originally an operator who picked up the call, but Instructor Yumelda popped up out of nowhere and gave me a harsh scolding."

"What did she say?"

"We are to prepare a report as well as a letter of repentance. And also, she mentioned you as well, Sheltis. Here's what she said: 'Consider the fact that you've ended up victorious, I'll not dwell on the fact that you ignored my orders. However, seeing how energetic you are, you are to resume training from tomorrow onwards'."

"..... Spare me from that."

He pressed his hands against his aching head and sat down on the ground.

"It's not the end of everything, huh....."

As he dwell on the words Kagura said in her report, Sheltis took a glance behind him.

— The dull yellow robe.

The robe worn by the man who calls himself Maha had fallen onto the ground, and was flapping haplessly against the wind.

"..... That's a really scary opponent. I never thought that man was a dummy made of sand."

Kagura bit her lips as she stared at the golden sand on the robe.

That's right, their opponent was just a dummy created by the 'Golden Hexahedral'. Thanks to the strike from Sheltis, their opponent reverted back into golden sand, leaving behind the robe on the ground.

"But..... you don't seem too surprised."

"I saw through that quite a while ago."

Sheltis nodded blankly.

"You realized that? When?"

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

"Right from the beginning, I guess. It didn't feel like I am fighting against a human being. And also his breathing, or the lack of it. It may be hard to distinguish it due to the robe covering his whole body, but you'll notice that he's not breathing if you look carefully."

"I see. So that's what the robe is for. I never realized that..... That's careless of me."

Kagura smiled wryly.

"Oh, I have to apologize."

"For?"

"The thing on your head..... It's broken."

Ahh, that— Kagura shrugged as she glanced at the fallen mechanical helmet. With her face basking under the sun, she put on a very happy smile.

"It's alright. I was thinking it's getting a little too tight for me. I'll make another one."

"Really? I thought it was rather huge."

"This thing here, they're different from yours."

As she said that, she touched her straight ears that were covered with warm fur.

"Right?"

There was a mischievous and childish smile on her face, which made her look very approachable.



..... So she can actually wear such a nice smile.

She had finally showed him her act of trust. Not words nor her knowledge, but her brightest smile.

"Alright, let's head back. There's still the report and the repentance letter waiting for us. Let's change your swords to pens and finish our work quickly."

Intermission

The colorless eyes

The eighty-seventh airspace located in the territory of the Government Sector.

There were many unnamed floating islands in the *Floating Archipelagos* <Lagoon>, one of which was covered in a lush primeval forest—

"There, mission complete."

Igun-I nodded his head in satisfaction as he put his white gloves back on.

Dipping his fingers into the chest pocket of his black suit, he fished out a watch to check the time.

Seven minutes till noon. He wanted to take a stroll around the primeval forest, but he had to meet up with Maha, who was very peculiar about time. The time was just about right. Maha is probably irritated from waiting.

Just then—

"Hmm? A call?"

The communicator in his pocket rang.

"Hello— ahh, it's been tough on you. Is the experiment done? That's great..... eh, that's not good at all! What happened..... mhmm."

After hearing the reasons through the communicator.

"Oh? Mr. Maha's dummy lost? And the water tank was destroyed?"

The ends of his lips curved upwards, forming a bewitching smile.

"Weird. I thought Mr Maha's very confident of that dummy of his. Oh? People from *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*>..... Sennenshi? Eh, the dummy had autonomous control, so Mr. Maha himself had no idea huh..... Fufu, you're funny. How can I possibly know?"

He said that lyrically.

Igun-I's voice was filled with happiness.

"Yes, my work here is done. The tracking screen of the 'Forbidden Crystal' and the water tank for the 'Slumbering Child' were destroyed. Mmm, I'll be heading back right now."

He disconnected the call and slotted the communicator back into his pocket.

"Is that so..... so that's what happened..... Welcome back."

The smile that appeared earlier was becoming deeper and deeper.

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

"Welcome back, Sheltis. I have been waiting for you all these while."

Stretching his arms out wide, Igun-I stared into the sky. It was as if he was welcoming someone whom he had been waiting for a long time.

"It's been really lonely. I've looked forward to this for so long..... I've always been waiting for your return. Hurry. Hurry. Hurry up and come to my side.

Hurry. Hurry. Hurry. Fill my blankness with your mateki.

Whiter than snow, and darker than night,

Redder than blood, and bluer than the seas,

A color that was more brilliant than the sun, the moon, the stars or the rainbow.

Dye me all over with your color.

Turn me into your color..... so that I can be by your side."

A gust of wind rustled the leaves of the trees.

By the time silence returned to the forest, the man was no longer on the *Floating Archipelagos* <Lagoon>.

Epilogue

To warm the icy fingertips

{1}

"I won't tell Monica about the mateki within your body."

Before the gate that led to the grounds of *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*>.

Kagura, who was sitting in the pilot's seat, turned her head around and said that as the cruising vehicle came to a halt.

"Are you fine with that?"

Sheltis asked uneasily. The girl replied with her usual cold expression,

"Yes. However, I think she'll come to know of it some day. When that happens, it's best that you're mentally prepared to tell her the truth yourself."

The dual sword wielder whom Monica admired three years ago — the fact that the young man who had fallen into the *Garden of Corrupted Song* <*Eden*> was still alive.

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

Not only so, he was carrying mateki in his body as well.

"..... I guess I do need to prepare myself mentally for that."

"I'll leave that to you. Let's not talk about that for now. Here, this is for you."

She passed him a piece of paper.

"This is the pass to my communication network. We're about to become teammates, so we should be able to communicate with each other at the very least."

Monica, Kagura, and Sheltis.

That's three, the minimum number of people required to take on missions.

"Well then, I'll be going. You should hurry to the hospital on the twenty-second floor as well."

"Mmm. See you."

Kagura drove the floating vehicle towards the hangar.

As he stood at the quiet area in front of the gate of *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*> and listened to the sounds of the engine, Sheltis turned his body away to face the direction which they came from — the western area of nature sector.

..... The 'Golden' Maha. And his companions whom I do not know of.

"— Not like it matters."

He stretched his hands to touch the holster that held his two swords on his back.

The water tank that incubated Yuugenshu, and the other which caged another Yuugenshu.

He had no idea what those two things signified, but he'll stop them if they endanger the safety of the floating continent as well as the safety of the Priestesses.

No matter when and how many times it happens, he would have to stop them. That was all there was to it.

"Don't even think about harming Ymy."

That must be the reason.

The reason he returned to *Tenketsu Palace* <Sophia>.

* * *

Two hundred and forty-seventh story of *Tenketsu Palace* <Sophia>.

In a tower built specially for the Queen and the Priestesses, one of the floors was specially reserved for the accommodation of the VIPs. Kagura was running breathlessly in the corridor of that floor.

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

"Huh..... Huh..... Ha..... Just you wait, Eyriey!"

After bidding Sheltis goodbye and parking the electric vehicle into the hangar, Kagura immediately took the main elevator to make her way to the floor.

— All so that she could challenge Eyriey.

"I-It should be here..... right? I'll..... I'll take a breather first."

She cannot allow Eyriey to see her in such a breathless state. Kagura took a few deep breathes to regulate her breathing..... Phew. Alright, this should be okay.

Ding dong

Came the cute sound of the doorbell.

"Hello, who is this?"

A relaxed voice came through the speakers.

"It's me. May I come in?"

"Oh— It's Kagura, isn't it? Sure, come on in."

There was the disengaging sound of the mechanical lock of the room. Kagura kicked the door open and rushed into the room.

"Oh, it's Kagura without her mechanical helmet. Your ears are really cute."

"People of Nell? That's rare."

Eyriey was sitting on the sofa of the room, while the *machine crystal* <Ilis> was placed on the table next to her.

"My ears are of no importance! Fu..... Fufu. That carefree attitude of yours shall end right now!"

Kagura stretched out her hand all of the sudden and pointed her finger at Eyriey.

"Eyriey, I am here to issue you a challenge!"

"Oh, what? If it's a challenge, then I'll accept it—"

Eyriey nodded her head with a cup of red tea in a hand. With that, Kagura began chanting,

"Zazakazada..... da..... zakarakara.....
zadadadzakakakazadazakazada..... rada.....
rakazazakakadada..... za..... zaza..... karakara.....
zadadadada..... There! What's the meaning behind that?"

"Hmm? What's with that disgusting quaternary numeral system? Ah, no wait, it should be a ternary numeral system."

"I do think it's a ternary numeral system as well. It is intricately disguised as a quaternary numeral system, but the 'ra' probably functions as a comma to signify a phrase."

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

The answers came instantly.

"Ah, so that's the opinion of Ilis as well huh?"

"Yup—"

"—Uhhh!? T-That easily!?"

They answered her immediately.

She lost totally.

"....."

"Oh? What's wrong, Kagura? If you wish to challenge me, you should shoot your question."

Kagura clenched her fists as she looked at the confused Eyriey.

"E-Eyriey, you're an idiot! That's the reason why I hate you the most——!"

"W-Whoa! What's wrong, Kagura!? Calm down!"

{2}

— It was already deep into the night when she woke up. A time when most people in the tower would be asleep already.

Someone had pulled open the curtains, allowing the moonlight to shine in.

The clear bluish-white moonlight happened to shine onto her eyelids through the slits of the curtain. That must have been what caused her to wake up.

"..... My face's a mess. Onee-sama would definitely scold me if she sees me like this."

She must have cried herself to sleep. I'sa laughed wryly when she saw her puffy eyelids in the reflection of the glass panes.

"Jin....."

Next to the chair that she slept on.

She tried calling out to her comatose partner who was on a medical ventilator. He obviously could not reply. Despite that, she still wished to call his name.

"....."

Pulling the blanket down slightly, she could see her bandaged arms.

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

"The ward..... is so cold."

I'sa gripped tightly onto his fingers — fingers that had become rugged due to the constant holding of the guns. As she gripped onto his hands quietly to offer him warmth—

"Hi, I'sa."

"H-Hyaaaa!"

I'sa's heart almost jumped out of her mouth when someone tapped on her shoulders all of a sudden.

"B-Boss..... sorry, Captain Run! W-W-Why are you here!?"

I'sa straightened herself immediately when she saw the girl who was roughly the same age as her.

She was a Sennenshi, with her lion's badge shimmering under the moonlight.

"I'm here to pay him a visit, of course. I had attended lots of meetings, and that occupied me a lot of my time. I asked the doctors before coming here, and it seems like no one is in critical condition, right?"

"Y-Yes! But of course. The members of *Tenketsu Palace* <Sophia> are no weaklings."

"I see. That's good."

Cree Run leaned herself onto the old chair.

"Speaking about the meeting which ran through the night, it's about that incident related to you guys—"

"..... Right."

That was obvious.

It was the incident of them encountering a mysterious shinryoku practitioner at the nature sector. Three squads were crushed by that person, so the commanders of the Law Enforcement Bureau had considered sending in a specialized team over.

"It's resolved already."

"..... Eh?"

"That strange shinryoku practitioner? He was taught a harsh lesson."

"..... Captain Run did that?"

"Idiot— how can that be? I intended to go, but someone got ahead of me."

Run pouted and crossed her arms with a bored expression.

"You should know who that person is, don't you?"

"....."

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

Someone who could defeat that monster. Someone other than the Sennenshi.

I'sa could only think of one person who fits the criteria.

How could that be possible? No, but..... it could only be him.

"I'll go in your stead."

"I'sa, you can stay by his side. I'll be fine by myself."

The dual-wield cadet guard.

..... He really went.

..... And he actually won.

"A-Ahaha..... So that's what happened."

Even though she was exhausted from crying. Despite the fact that her tears had dried up.

— A drop of tear slid down her cheek.

"That's all from me. I'll be heading off."

"W-Wait a second, Boss."

She addressed her superior as that in a fluster, but Run did not

seem to mind.

"If you see him..... can you thank him for me?"

"Haa? You should be doing that yourself."

"I can't....."

I'sa shook her head gently in response to Run's frowning face.

"I don't think I'll be able to say that. Because if I ever see him, I'll definitely be saying something else."

"Which is?"

Her superior asked her with a serious expression.

I'sa clenched her fist and looked at Run with a determined expression.

"..... 'I'll definitely not lose the next time'."

"So you do know what is expected from you."

Run put on an innocent smile.

"We'll definitely win the next time round — including that shinryoku practitioner which gave us so much trouble. That's an order."

"Mmm. We'll not lose."

That shinryoku practitioner as well as the dual sword wielder. She

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

will definitely not lose to them ever again.

I'sa nodded her head repeatedly as she grabbed onto the hands of her partner.

* * *

At the entrance of the hospital.

"Looks like..... it's not the right time for me to enter."

Realizing that I'sa and Run were chatting happily in the ward, Sheltis walked away restlessly.

"Oh well, it's already this late into the night. There's always tomorrow."

First, he received treatment in the hospital, followed by a lengthy lecture from Instructor Yumelda which lasted for a few hours..... and before he knew it, it was already late into the night.

— It's about time I head back to sleep as well.

"The doctor must have been really angry, right? She must have said how reckless you are and so on."

"I am already sick of hearing that."

A familiar voice came from his back. He knew who person was without even turning around.

"But of course. I'll definitely be furious if I was the doctor as well."

The night lights were shining on a Priestess in the dim corridor.

The first thing that came to his eyes was her pale golden hair. Next was the pure white vestment with a touch of blue. And finally—

"I'm here to pay a visit..... Run and I..... and everyone else were attending the meeting till late at night."

An elegant and gentle girl was standing before him with a smile on her face.

"A meeting?"

"Under the orders of Queen Salah, Run was to prepare herself for the trip to the nature sector. Whenever things are serious enough for the Sennenshi to be activated, the Priestesses will be notified about it as well..... But before that could happen, a certain someone had already settled everything by himself without any concern of his own health and safety."

Ymy could not help but to giggle when she emphasized on 'a certain someone'.

"The upper brass of *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*> were still discussing this issue. Who is the person who defeated the squads? From the way things are, it seems like they had secretly dispatched an investigation team to look into the matter."

"They are investigating the Government Sector?"

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

"..... They did not say it, but I guess they will be focusing their attention on them."

Sheltis thought of that possibility as well. If that man belonged to a faction other than *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*>, then the only faction left would be the Government Sector. Moreover, both water tanks were located on the *Floating Archipelagos* <*Lagoon*> that were under the jurisdiction of the Government Sector.

"But..... Is it really okay for us to do that?"

The young girl walked over to his side.

"I felt disgusted when I heard that. Why do we have to suspect each other? We are all living on the floating continent."

Ymy Ele Soufflenictole.

She was a Priestess who protects the floating continent. At that time, her eyes were filled with grief.

..... She did say this during her speech.

"From now on, let's support each other.....
Because we are fellow companions who are all living on the floating continent, and residing in the same tower."

An unknown amount of time passed as he stared at the profile of

her depressed face.

"I can't really say it very well."

Suppressing the frustration for his inability to express the thoughts of his mind, Sheltis tried to voice his honest feelings.

"But I think there is no need for you to worry about this."

"Why?"

"It's the job for the directors of *Tenketsu Palace* <*Sophia*> to worry about the negotiations with the Government Sector. We are not omnipotent. Of course, thinking itself is not a bad thing, but thinking too much into things will not help either. Only a Priestess can do the things a Priestess is supposed to do — aren't you the one who said that in front of everyone?"

That caused Ymy's stiff expressions to soften a little.

"Ah..... Well, I am really happy..... so you heard my speech?"

"Mmm. I thought your performance was spectacular."

There was no one else around the entrance of hospital.

Ymy had been listening to him quietly for a while. She finally asked hesitantly,

"..... So Sheltis thinks so as well? Am I really thinking too much?"

"It's the same for me too. Just today, I thought about too many

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

things, but what I saw was only a narrow portion of the whole thing. It's about time I reflect on that."

That applied to his impression of Kagura. He originally thought of her as a blunt and wary person, so he never expect that innocent smile of hers after she removed her mechanical helmet.

"..... Queen Salah said almost the same things as you did, Sheltis."

"Queen Salah? That Queen?"

"Mmm. I consulted her in something, and she gave me the same answer as well. Since you are a Priestess, you will have to first play the role as a Priestess..... she is right."

Her smile was mixed with a hint of worry—

"Sheltis—"

His childhood friend nodded her head and changed her tone into a light one.

"I'll work even harder so as not to let down my name as the Priestess of Baptism..... And so, please give me a little more time in regards to your mateki."

"My mateki?"

"I think I can promise you this. It may take me a while, but I'll definitely treat your mateki. Because when you've finally become

my Sennenshi—"

Ymy suddenly stretched out her hands.

Under the illumination of the lights in the dim corridor, the fingertips of the young girl seemed incredibly white. They stopped short of coming into contact with his chest.

It was a distance that is closer, and yet further away than anyone else — the repulsion from Elbert Resonance forbids them to come into contact.

"..... Right?"

Her eyes were originally filled with grief, but the young girl finally overcame that sadness and broke into a smile.

"There will be a distance between us should this continue on, am I right? I'll think of a way to deal with the mateki in Sheltis' body. Therefore, all you have to do is to focus on your things and continue to do your best."

Ymy tapped her own chest confidently.

Sheltis could not help but to blush when he saw her childish and innocent smile.

"Promise?"

"..... Mmm."

He could only nod his head embarrassingly in response to her gaze.

GOLDEN BOUNDARIES

"Well then, I—"

"I?"

Upon being stared at by the gaze of Ymy that was filled with anticipation, Sheltis could only offer a wry smile—

"I'll do my best. In lots of areas."

"Ah, that's unfair! Tell me what they are! That's the most important part!"

"..... I put it that way precisely because it's embarrassing, so please spare me from that."

[END]



CE LIGHT NOVEL TRANSLATION



Translator: **zgmfx09a**



Editor 1: **Alice**



Editor 2: **DrkMercenary**



Editor 3: **David Dong**

PDF: **Sefirosu**